CRISES
INNOVATION & TRANSFORMATION

Liberal Arts & Humanities in an Evolving Context

CONVENORS

DR. GARGI BHARADWAJ
DR. PRIYA RANJAN
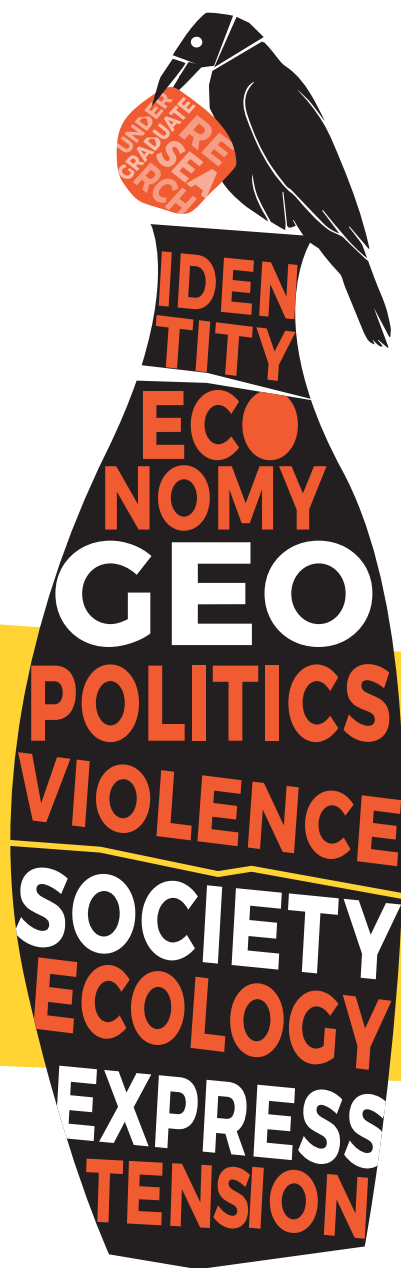
STUDENT CONVENORS

JOANN SUSAN WILSON
KAARTHIK GARIMELLA

CONTACT
resconf.jslh@jgu.edu.in

UNDER GRADUATE RESEARCH

IDENTITY
ECONOMY
GEO
POLITICS
VIOLENCE
SOCIETY
ECOLOGY
EXPRESS
TENSION

**Jindal School of
Liberal Arts & Humanities**
India's First Transnational Humanities School

O.P. JINDAL GLOBAL
INSTITUTION OF EMINENCE DEEMED TO BE
UNIVERSITY
A Private University Promoting Public Service

CONCEPT NOTE

Undergraduate Research Conference, 2024 (7th edition) Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities Jindal Global University, Sonipat

Crises, Innovation and Transformation: Liberal Arts & Humanities in an Evolving Context

At different moments, public discourse and scholarship have agreed upon a sense of crisis to be affecting different spheres of human life and the world. We are now, once again, in such a moment, which appears to be afflicted by crises of various sorts, affecting almost all spheres. Some of these crises relate to large-scale social processes– economic crisis, ecological crisis, geopolitical and political crises and so on. Yet others relate to the most intimate of matters–crises of identity, self and personhood, crises relating to intimacy, conjugality, familial relationships, kinship and so on. Often, moments of crises also reveal the deep fault lines of society and ecology, and in this sense are 'good to think with'. Crises simultaneously generate opportunities for interventions, innovations, and transformations. In this sense, crises are 'good to act in' for both dominant and subaltern groups and actors. The diverse ways in which crises are identified and interpreted have a bearing on our social and political as well as educational contexts. In imparting an interdisciplinary education, Humanities and Liberal Arts institutions play a crucial role in engendering in-depth understanding of different crises. They are also in a unique position to facilitate an examination of the interconnections between these crises. They can be instrumental in encouraging students to radically rethink some of the basic assumptions about contemporary crises and to contribute, through innovative and transformatory modes, to the overcoming of these crises. The JSLH Undergraduate Research Conference, 2024 invites papers, artworks, performances and poster presentations that broadly respond to this thematic. We are interested in research that examines specific crises, the interconnections between crises, and the different ways in which institutions, groups, and persons respond to crises. We also welcome papers focusing on the representation of crises in popular culture as well as in scholarship. Conference contributions can be informed by disciplines such as economics, business studies, literature, sciences, history, sociology, anthropology, psychology, political science, visual studies, performance studies, and film studies.
The twofold purpose of the conference is to foster and reward the scholarly efforts of undergraduate students as well as to provide a valuable learning experience. The papers presented must be, primarily, the work of the undergraduate student(s). Faculty members who deserve recognition can also be mentioned. Research projects must have been conducted under the supervision of a faculty member or professional in the field. Emphasis will be laid upon promoting interdisciplinary studies that look at the connections between social sciences and humanities disciplines. This conference aims to hear from undergraduate students and help refine their research ideas. Equally, the conference offers them an opportunity to get acquainted with the process and rigor of identifying and establishing linkages between critical themes of contemporary disciplines, understanding sound research design and methodology.

Table of Contents

1. Dean's Message

The Best of URC 2024

I am delighted to present a selection of the seven best papers that were presented during the 2024 Undergraduate Research Conference (URC). As the Conference title, *Crisis, Innovation and Transformation,* suggests, the research presentations covered a range of topics that reflected the way in which disruption in multiple spheres of our lives can lead to outcomes that although painful can also generate innovation and creativity. As humans strive to adjust to a new existential reality within the realms of the personal, the social and the political, changes in ways of thinking and being occur. The papers presented in this collection demonstrate how the authors interpreted the meaning of the concept of crisis and how the responses to change focus on flexibility and creativity.

Over eighty-five undergraduate students contributed to the conference; of these the best were selected by a multi-disciplinary editorial board who, after two readings, based their decision on the academic significance, the clarity of expression and the originality of ideas. In making their selection, the experts considered the choice of the research methodology, the implied logic of the presentation and how substantial the findings were. Within the parameters of the conference theme, presenters broadly interpreted the topic to include identity, gender and the response to violence because of war, environmental disasters and population displacement.

The selection of the outstanding papers illustrates the purpose of the URC, namely, to offer young scholars the opportunity to contribute original and meaningful research within academia and beyond. As we are living in a period of seemingly constant change, the vision of the current generation of researchers sheds light on the past, the present and the future from a perspective that is often uninhibited by biases of the past and apprehension to confront the future.

My congratulations to the students whose papers are presented here. I would like to express my gratitude to all the students who presented their research. A special thank you goes to the members of the selection committee and the editorial board for their effort to provide a lasting record of the URC 2024. Thank you to all the student volunteers, faculty and administrative staff of the Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities and O.P. Jindal Global University (JGU) who made this conference possible. My sincere appreciation to all the teachers throughout India who support and believe in the contribution students make to expanding fields of knowledge.

We are grateful to the JGU Vice Chancellor C. Raj Kumar whose continued support has made the URC possible for eight consecutive years.

Kathleen Modrowski
Professor and Dean,
Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities
O.P. Jindal Global University

2. Editorial

The Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities is proud to announce this first conference proceedings from its Undergraduate Research Conference 2024. The theme of the conference was **Crisis, Innovation and Transformation: Liberal Arts and Humanities in an Evolving Context.** There were 25 panels with more than 85 student presentations from departments within Jindal Global University and other universities. This document is a compilation of seven papers that were selected from these huge number of paper presentations. In the initial round, the chairs were requested to recommend the best papers from their panels. These students were then invited to submit their full and revised papers to us for review. We received about 14 papers and put them through two rigorous rounds of review by our faculty experts after which 7 were finally selected for this compilation. These papers represent diverse disciplinary perspectives, sociology, anthropology, psychology, gender studies, and visual arts. The students have used a range of tools for their inquiry including surveys, in-depth interviews, ethnographic exploration and analysis of physical objects and visual mediums. Each paper addresses the concept note of the conference in a nuanced and creative manner.

Using perspectives from sociology of sports, Kashika Singh explores how Indian Premier League (IPL) and the emergence of the Women's T20 Challenge (WPL) are challenging deeply entrenched, historically present gender biases in the erstwhile male-dominated world of cricket and a highly masculine world of sports in general. Although it doesn't delve into the intersection of gender with caste and class, the paper does acknowledge and emphasize the need to use an intersectional lens for analysis of how gender intersects with other identities to produce experiences of marginalization within the sport. From disproportionate financial support to lack of encouragement from male counterparts, family members, schools, lopsided media coverage of women's cricket to something seemingly minor yet quite significant such as a gender-blind tradition of 'all-white clothing', patriarchy is all-pervasive and continues to shape attitudes towards women players. Although new reforms about equal pay have been recently introduced, attitudinal shifts have a long way to go. Along somewhat similar lines, Aanyaa Manas' paper explores evolving fashion norms among students in University of Delhi and how traditional gender constructs in clothing and fashion are being challenged. Set against the backdrop of Delhi as a city that claims to be diverse, global and cosmopolitan, and as a city with historical presence of queer community and spaces, the paper explores how gender-neutral fashion is being used by the youth to express and negotiate their identities. However, they too are often faced with traditional expectations. Both the papers argue that while the arenas, whether it is fashion or sports, have significantly transformed to become gender inclusive, there remains considerable room for improvement as they continue to be shaped by patriarchal ideas.

Using a sociological perspective, Chetna Rani and Jigeesha Bhargavi's paper studies positioning of postmenopausal women, analyzing how societal narratives and self-perception shift after menopause. Through interviews across socio-economic backgrounds, it explores the impact of dominant medical discourses and the rise of feminist scholarship that challenge the framing of menopause as a 'crisis.' Arjun Srivastava's paper examines the intricate dynamics of

parentification, focusing on its influence on adolescent development, parent-child relationships, and internalizing behaviors. Through a review of existing literature, the paper shifts attention from the causes of parentification to how it occurs, highlighting the role of open communication in mitigating its negative effects and underscoring the need for supportive interventions.

The papers by Meher Pannu and Easwar Balakrishnan delve into larger and devastating episodes of crisis. The partition of India, a past that continues to haunt and shape the present, and the crisis in Gaza which is unfolding as we speak. Meher Pannu's paper on memories of partition of the Indian subcontinent narrates how the second and third generation almost relives the trauma of partition through inherited artefacts, from everyday objects like sewing machines to storage chests to photographs capturing the migration of people. They relive a memory that isn't their own through these objects and visuals. While these objects are a constant and painful reminders of a traumatic and life-altering episode in one life, they are also preserved with care and continue to tell stories of loss and displacement, of a life that once was. Easwar Balakrishnan's paper explores the role of visuality in shaping the meaning and impact of crisis images, focusing on the ongoing events in Gaza. The paper utilizes perspectives from Mirzoeff, Barthes, and Haraway and analyzes press photographs to examine how images function as weapons, influence power relations, and generate affective responses. The paper argues that studying images requires more than just analyzing what they visiblize. The very act demands an investigation into what is rendered invisible. As visuality reinforces authority, reclaiming the 'right to look' becomes a political act of resistance against the structures that control and shape what is seen and unseen.

In a world where we are constantly grappling with crises, violence and apathy, destruction and loss of life, Manhar Bansal's 'love affair with theory' engages with the possibilities to rescue and recover the imagination of alternative worlds, to free the human imagination arrested by capitalist logic. Using Ruth Levitas' 'Utopia as Method', the paper pushes for the courage to imagine alternatives, foster possibilities for subversive acts and revolutionary change and inculcate a 'desire to desire the impossible'. And this is where it foregrounds the role of critical theory in making this imagination possible. To read a young scholar envisage and encourage possibilities of alternative futures was profound and inspiring for us.

Dr. Sriti Ganguly
Dr. Aparna Vyas
Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities
O.P. Jindal Global University

3. Acknowledgements

I Breaking Boundaries:
An Exploration of Gendered Nature of Cricket

Kashika Singh,
Indraprastha College of Women, Delhi University[1]

Introduction

Cricket, often hailed as a symbol of national pride and unity in India, is grappling with a 'crisis' of gender inequality that pervades every facet of the sport. This issue is deeply rooted in established societal norms and frameworks that uphold the exclusion of women in cricketing environments. The disparity is caused by gender roles, perceptions of masculinity and femininity, patriarchal systems, media portrayals, and the impact of spectators, all of which collectively contribute to obstructing women's involvement, representation, and acknowledgment in the realm of cricket. The paper tries to explore how initiatives like the Indian Premier League (IPL)[2] and the emergence of the Women's T20 Challenge (WPL)[3] are transforming the landscape of cricket and challenging traditional gender norms.

In the world of cricket, a sport deeply woven into the fabric of many societies, gender roles have long influenced who plays and how they are perceived. Max Weber's social stratification theory offers valuable insights into the gendered division of labor in the realm of cricket, mirroring overarching societal norms and stereotypes pertaining to the roles of men and women in athletic activities. Throughout history, cricket has been predominantly framed as a pursuit dominated by men, wherein males occupy positions of higher esteem and power within the the domain of sports (Weber, 2013).

Building on the understanding of cricket as a male-dominated sport, it is crucial to examine how social institutions within cricket perpetuate gender inequalities. Social institutions play a crucial role in upholding social unity while simultaneously upholding established power dynamics. Cricketing institutions often exhibit patriarchal systems with men holding most positions of authority, resembling organic solidarity where individuals are integrated based on their roles and hence, maintaining social order. This creates a hierarchical structure that reinforces male dominance and limits women's participation in decision-making (Durkheim, 2014).

Cricket's evolution into a commercial powerhouse reflects the broader trend of commodification in sports. This shift has transformed cricket into a lucrative industry, where corporate investments and branding redefine its play and consumption. The focus on profit and marketability often sidelines equitable representation, reinforcing existing social hierarchies and gender disparities.

---

1 Ms. Kashika Singh is a third-year Sociology undergraduate at Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi. She is passionate about interdisciplinary intersections of Sociology, Political Science, and Economics, with interests in Sociology of Sports, Digital Sociology, Gender Studies, Visual Ethnography, and Urban Studies.

2 https://www.iplt20.com/?_gl=1*11kr79b*_ga*MTQ1NzA3OTMxNi4xNzExNjM4MTc1*_ga_EKRMMW7KM9*MTcxMTc4MjM4My4yLjAuMTcxMTc4MjM4NC41OS4wLjA.

3 https://www.wplt20.com/?_gl=1*1r2v3xh*_ga*MTQ1NzA3OTMxNi4xNzExNjM4MTc1*_ga_EKRMMW7KM9*MTcxMTc4MjM4My4yLjAuMTcxMTc4MjM4NC41OS4wLjA.

As private enterprises shape the sport's future, the challenge remains to balance commercial interests with inclusivity and fairness. Undoubtedly, the increasing commodification of the sport is bringing about a change in the way it is played, viewed, and consumed (Gopal & Prakash, 2021). Gopal and Prakash argue that it is actually private enterprises, such as corporations and private foundations that are significantly influencing the sports landscape. This influence is evident in the rise of sports academies focused on excellence, substantial investments in branding sports and athletes, advancements in sports-related technologies, modifications of traditional sports to attract new audiences, and the development of a global market for sports goods.

Media plays a pivotal role in this commodification process, significantly shaping public perception. Media portrayals of cricket show bias towards male players over females, driven by profit-focused content selection (Delaney, 2015). Narratives in media affect societal views on gender in cricket, perpetuating stereotypes that devalue women's role. Fans contribute to gender inequality in cricket through their behavior, influenced by collective consciousness (Durkheim, 2014). Gendered fan culture in cricket hinders women's involvement and supports existing power dynamics.

As a sex-segregated group sport of vast national importance, cricket offers an interesting site to observe how women's participation can influence gender dynamics in highly gendered spaces as well as the implications of such influence on gender equality. This paper seeks to understand the potential of sports to act as a catalyst for societal transformation.

While this paper primarily addresses gender inequality in cricket, it is important to acknowledge caste, much like gender, plays an important role in shaping the accessibility and representation within the sport. "*Cricket in India is not just a sport but a reflection of the deep-rooted social hierarchies, where caste, class, and privilege often determine access and opportunities.*"[4] Cricket, deeply ingrained in Indian society, reflects broader social hierarchies, and caste dynamics often influence who gets to play and who reaches the higher levels of the sport. Ramchandra Guha also argues that "Caste has influenced cricket's internal dynamics in the country, as players from privileged caste backgrounds have traditionally had better access to resources, training, and opportunities."[5]

Literature review

Michael Atkinson defines 'Sociology of sport' as the systematic, empirically grounded, and theoretically/conceptually driven analysis of sport and physical culture (Atkinson, 2015). "Sport is shown to be a significant culture in which hegemonic masculinities and restricted, inferiorised femininities are constructed and reinforced." (Humberstone, 2002). Through her analysis, Humberstone challenges these binary conceptions of gender and explores how individuals negotiate and resist normative gender expectations within the realm of sport and leisure.

---

4 Shantanu Tambe, "Caste in Cricket: A Hidden Reality," Economic and Political Weekly, 2019.

5 https://www.telegraphindia.com/sports/cricket-and-caste-system/cid/1676237

Varisha Sharma in 'Is Cricket a Gender Biased Game? India in Relation to the World' 2018 critically examines the gender bias entrenched within cricket, dissecting its historical, social, economic, and constitutional dimensions. It identifies factors such as societal stereotypes, political influence, and resource allocation disparities as contributors to cricket's status as a male-dominated sport. Highlighting the crisis of unequal opportunities and representation for women in cricket, the paper advocates for innovative approaches and transformative changes, such as increased funding, better media representation, and policy reforms, to promote equality and inclusivity in the sport (Sharma, 2018).

Drawing upon various theoretical frameworks to contextualize the study, including feminist perspectives, critical sports sociology, and the concept of gender-bland sexism Parry et al. in the text 'Walking the Walk: Gender-bland Sexism, The Fan Experience and Perceptions of Value in Women's Professional Cricket' argue that gender-bland sexism refers to subtler forms of discrimination and bias that may not be overtly hostile but still perpetuate gender inequalities by reinforcing traditional gender roles and stereotypes. They emphasize the importance of fan support for media coverage, sponsorship, and investment in women's cricket. Gender biases among sports fans are also noted, affecting attitudes towards women's sports (Parry, Richards, Batey, & Khan).

Souvik Naha (2022) discusses how gender norms and social hierarchies affected cricket venues, spectator behaviours, and perceptions of cricket's masculinity. Her article explores resistance to gender norms in cricket spectatorship and the sport's impact on power structures and provides insights into cricket spectatorship in Calcutta, emphasizing the historical and socio-cultural dynamics. It contributes to understanding the intersection of gender and power in sports spectatorship, addressing identity, representation, and social change complexities in urban settings (Naha, 2022).

Similarly, by analyzing the production processes and content of televised sports news, Michela Musto tries to uncover the ways in which gender-bland sexism is constructed and reinforced within the media context. The analysis of 25 years (1989-2014) of data highlights the marginalization of women's sports in media coverage, with limited airtime, lack of commentary, and minimal promotion. The study also uncovers the objectification of female athletes, focusing on their appearance, personal lives, and relationships rather than their athletic achievements. The findings suggest that the production of gender-bland sexism in televised sports news contributes to the underrepresentation and devaluation of women's sports, reinforcing societal norms and expectations (Michela Musto, 2017).

Based on the literature reviewed, it is clear that cricket remains deeply entrenched in gender bias, mirroring broader societal norms. The sport continues to perpetuate traditional gender roles, with men dominating both on and off the field. Institutional and cultural practices reinforce these biases, creating systemic barriers for women, such as unequal opportunities and resource allocation. Subtle biases persist in media portrayals and fan perceptions, further marginalizing women's cricket. These studies highlight the need for significant changes to dismantle these biases and promote gender equality within the sport.

Gaps in research

One significant gap in existing literature pertains to the scarcity of research specifically examining the intersection of gender and cricket. Despite cricket being a widely popular sport with a rich cultural and social significance, there has been relatively limited scholarly attention dedicated to unpacking the complexities of gender within the cricketing context.

Further, exploration of gendering in cricket among intersecting marginalized identities remains under researched. Scholarly attention focuses on gender disparities rather than nuanced intersections with other identities. Studies mainly cover elite-level cricket, neglecting grassroots initiatives for gender equality and inclusion. There is a dearth of research examining the experiences of individuals who participate in cricket at the grassroots level, where gender dynamics may manifest differently and where interventions to address gender inequality may have a more significant impact. Although caste is not the focus of this research, it remains an underlying factor that, alongside gender, contributes to the broader structures of exclusion and privilege in Indian cricket.

This paper tries to address these gaps through sociological research among cricket players and audiences. The central question being asked is: How do historical, cultural, and institutional factors interact to perpetuate and accumulate the crisis of gender inequality within the cricketing domain?
By delving into historical, cultural, and institutional factors, this research question offers a holistic understanding of the root causes of gender disparities in cricket. Understanding gender inequality accumulation in cricket is important due to systemic barriers hindering participation. Identifying barriers can lead to targeted interventions by cricket authorities. This analysis is important as global movements for gender equality gather strength, necessitating the dismantling of systemic disparities in cricket. Investigating gender crisis accumulation in cricket can contribute to fostering gender equality and inclusivity in the sport. Addressing gender disparities in cricket is crucial for realizing the sport's potential for empowerment and social change.

Through sociological analysis, this research can contribute to broader discussions on gender equity and social justice, highlighting the need for systemic change in cricketing institutions and practices to achieve genuine equality and inclusivity.

Research objectives:
- To analyze how patriarchal systems and hierarchical structures in cricket institutions sustain gender disparities from grassroots level.
- To examine the influence of societal norms, gender roles, and perceptions of masculinity and femininity on gender inequality in cricket.
- The study aims to explore how biased media representations and fan involvement influence gender inequality.

Research Methodology
This paper is a product of primary research conducted over a period of 2 months in New Delhi. Using a mixed method approach, I have used both qualitative and quantitative methods along with a gender perspective to explore the gendered nature of cricket and to understand the dynamics of gender representation and participation within the sport.

The research design integrates primary and secondary data sources, to provide a comprehensive analysis of the gendered nature of cricket. The research methodology involves a combination of field observations and snowball sampling[6] to collect data on gender dynamics in WPL (Women Premier League) cricket. This mixed-methods approach enables a nuanced exploration of gender dynamics.

A major part of the paper draws from ethnographic research done among the spectators and players. As part of the investigation, a field visit was also made to the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi during a Women's Premier League match. Observations were made at the game to scrutinize the engagements, conduct, and dynamics exhibited by the players, coaches, officials, and audience. Detailed records are taken during the stadium visit, focusing on various facets of the match such as player performances, crowd responses, and the general ambiance.

The research method of snowball sampling was used to identify and interview key stakeholders engaged in WPL cricket. These initial participants included fans present at the stadium during the match, providing valuable insights into gender dynamics, experiences, and perceptions within the cricketing community. Participants were then requested to suggest other individuals who could offer valuable perspectives on gender dynamics in WPL cricket, creating a *referral chain* that expands the sample size and diversity of viewpoints.

Alongside this a structured questionnaire with both close and open-ended questions was also circulated to cricket players, non-players, and fans to gather quantitative data on their perceptions, experiences, and attitudes towards gender in cricket. A total of 40 responses were collected of which 34 respondents were aged between 16-21yrs and 6 between 22-27 yrs. Respondents included 17 men and 23 women.

Following this, semi structured interviews were conducted with 6 cricket players at Ranji[7], state, district and college levels along with 2 viewers, 2 students who are interested in the sport. These interviews will provide qualitative insights into the lived experiences, challenges, and aspirations of individuals involved in the sport with a focus on women. This is further supplemented by secondary sources related to cricket media content, which included news articles, broadcasts, and social media discussions. The quantitative method involved coding and categorizing the content to identify representations of gender, stereotypes, and biases within cricket media coverage. A thorough examination of the past and current literature on gender in cricket was conducted to offer theoretical frameworks, conceptual insights, and empirical evidence for the study.

---

6 https://research.oregonstate.edu/irb/policies-and-guidance-investigators/guidance/snowball-sampling
7 https://www.bcci.tv/domestic/269/ranji-trophy

History of cricket in India

The introduction of cricket to India can be traced back to the British colonial era. The East India Company, which controlled large parts of India in the 18th and 19th centuries, played a significant role in popularizing cricket in the subcontinent. British soldiers, administrators, and traders stationed in India introduced the sport to local populations, and it quickly gained traction among indigenous elites and the urban middle class (Birley, 1999).

During the 19th century cricket became intertwined with notions of masculinity, prestige, and social status. The colonial legacy established cricket as a predominantly male pursuit, with limited opportunities for female participation or involvement. Male cricketers have historically dominated the sport, shaping its development and identity in India (Majumdar, 2004).

Originally limited to the colonial elite and the wealthy, cricket evolved into a more egalitarian domain welcoming men from diverse social strata. Presently, men's cricket stands as the predominant iteration of the sport, while women's cricket is relegated to a marginalized position and often regarded as "outsiders"(Gupta R. , 2021).

Women's cricket in India began later. It was an Australian teacher who introduced cricket in Kerala in 1913. Women's cricket gained popularity in Delhi in the 1950s, with clubs developing in the 1960s. The Women's Cricket Association of India was established in 1973 and recognized in 1978. It was more than 200 years after cricket entered India as a man's sport, and almost half a century after the formal organization of men's cricket at the national level. This led to inter-state tournaments, where an increasing number of states participated, and eventually to many other tournaments (Gupta R. , 2021). The inception of international women's cricket in India occurred in 1975 and has experienced significant growth since then (Gupta R. , 2021) (Duncan, 2013). It was with the 2013 Women's World Cup that the women's cricket gained popularity especially in India.

Factors leading to the gender *crisis* in cricket

Despite India's reputation as a 'cricketing superpower,' it faces several challenges in the realm of women's cricket. Women's cricket holds a marginalized position with lesser opportunities for participation and recognition; women's game does not receive much coverage and is rendered invisible, while also being marked out as '*other'* or an outsider and not a '*real'* form of cricket; and women hold little, if any, power over key decisions within the sport (Gupta R., 2021). This section aims to highlight some of the key issues that hinder the true development of women's cricket in the country.

Deeply ingrained social norms and conventions in Indian society shape gender perceptions in sports, reinforcing male dominance in cricket thus questioning the foundation of patriarchal control (Vertinsky, 1994). This is the reason why a women's game and its development is often considered in relationship to the development of men's cricket(Velija, 2015).

"*I often found it difficult to get permission from my family for practicing late night with the male coach as there were a very few chances of a female coach*" says Palak a player of college team from Ghaziabad in her interview. Rohit a Ranji player from Delhi mentions that his mother barely knew the C of Cricket, it was his father with whom he watched cricket.

In India and in many other countries women have started playing cricket with boys which act as both a support and a form of exclusion further internalizing the belief that cricket is a male centric sport. It all starts from the grassroot level. Many schools in India don't offer cricket to girls and if offered don't have a female coach. Girls find it difficult to find a proper academy for training and coaching. Grassroots facilities have the potential to influence both the number and caliber of female athletes, consequently shaping the overall standing of women's cricket in relation to men's cricket (Gupta R. , 2021). Practitioners argue that female coaches have little or no support for overcoming the various types of barriers – such as low confidence, lack of support, and deep-rooted sports stereotypes – they face, and strategies to change this state of affairs are very limited (Katsarova, 2019). Neha, one of the respondents mentioned that "*hume toh bass side me ladko ke saath khila lete the*"(They used to let us play on the side with the boys), she claimed that often very less importance is given to women's cricket is schools.

However, women play much fewer matches than men, across all formats and age groups. Frequent inter-school matches and club-level tournaments for girls, usually organized for boys, will allow talent in women's cricket to develop.[8]

This section explores how cricket's association with masculinity influences perceptions and opportunities for women in the sport. By examining traditional views and evolving attitudes towards gender roles in cricket, we aim to understand the ongoing challenges faced by women and the implications of these gendered perceptions for their participation and representation in the sport. Traditionally, cricket was perceived as a game reserved for men, often referred to as the 'gentleman's game'. The ethical guidelines pertaining to cricket regulated the display of masculine sportsmanship, encompassing principles such as fair competition, allegiance to the team, and control of intense emotions during gameplay. Women, lack the automatic equality and entitlement in sport that men enjoy (Burnett, 2001).The omission of specific regulations, such as those concerning the dimensions of the ball, did not impact the uniformity of the regulations. Despite this, there persisted prevailing beliefs regarding cricket being primarily a sport associated with masculinity, and societal expectations related to femininity served to uphold its status as a domain predominantly occupied by men (velija , 2015)The construction of cricket as 'male' also requires establishing the sport as 'not female', thus associating the sport with masculinity i.e. not femininity plays an important role in women's exclusion from the sport (Gupta R. , 2021). Thus, relating cricket to masculine attributes goes hand in hand with othering of women, allowing men to continue to protect the hegemonic spot(Gupta R. , 2021). One of the respondents, Rohit argued that "girls play *bat ball* and not cricket[9]" and that their matches are not *interesting* as one doesn't see powerful and big hits. Supriya mentions in her interview that girls are often seen as fragile and *bechaari* (helpless) by boys [and] all these ideas impact girls psychologically.

---

8 [Anupriya: Measures the BCCI must take to improve the health of women's cricket in India | ESPNcricinfo](#)

9 Showcasing the non-professional nature of women's cricket contrasting sharply with the highly organized and professional nature of men's cricket.

Despite being at the peak of their careers, female athletes often struggle to gain recognition. Whether it's the Women's Football or Cricket World Cup, the situation remains unchanged: they face either outright dismissive comments about the inferiority of women's sports or patronizing remarks like, "*Sure, the quality isn't on par with men's, but isn't it admirable that they're trying?*" (Donoghue, 2017).While many attributes related to cricket have evolved and changed over time it is still being recognized as masculine. In fact, the notions of masculinity have evolved from merely a 'gentlemanly' sport to an aggressive masculine sport (Gupta R. , 2021).

Financial support has been a major hurdle for women cricketers and association. Male Indian cricketers receive high pay from match fees, contracts, sponsorships, and endorsements. Historically, elite-level women players played international matches voluntarily, paying for their own travel and expenses. There have been wide differences in the remuneration structure and amount, match fee, benefits, and prize money for women and men, both in India and abroad. The mergers with the ICC and national associations brought more funding to women's cricket, but huge disparities remain, limiting participation and growth opportunities for women.[10] BCCI[11] grants central contracts to male players in different categories, with higher grades offering more money. They also earn from domestic and international tournaments, and the IPL. BCCI's revenue-sharing model ensures male players get a significant share of income, boosting their earnings.

While the BCCI introduced central contracts for female players, the financial rewards are significantly lower than those offered to their male counterparts. Female cricketers also earn less from match fees, sponsorships, and endorsements, as women's cricket in India continues to grapple with limited resources and commercial opportunities. Despite the growing popularity of women's cricket and increased media coverage, disparities in pay persist, exacerbating gender inequalities within the sport. (Joshi, 2020)

There is another significant issue that needs attention, which is the requirement to play Test cricket in all-white clothing. The tradition dates to the early days of the sport, around the 19th century, when cricket was predominantly played during the day, and the stark white attire was considered the most appropriate and gentlemanly choice. Cricket whites exude a sense of purity and tradition, embodying the spirit of fair play and sportsmanship that has defined Test cricket for centuries. The uniformity of white outfits also adds an element of elegance to the game, creating a visually striking spectacle as players engage in strategic battles under the bright sunlight. The choice of white for Test matches is not solely about tradition; practical considerations also play a crucial role. The extended duration of Test matches means players are exposed to varying weather conditions, including intense sunlight, over the course of several days. White clothing reflects sunlight and heat, helping players stay cooler on the field.[12]

---

10 [Anupriya: Measures the BCCI must take to improve the health of women's cricket in India | ESPNcricinfo](#)

11 https://www.bcci.tv/

Alternate names are utilized instead of the original names of the respondents to ensure anonymity.

12 [https://www.kidzherald.com/the-colourful-tale-of-cricket-jerseys-why-whites-in-tests-and-colours-in-odis-and-t20s/#:~:text=The%20tradition%20dates%20back%20to,most%20appropriate%20and%20gentlemanly%20choice.](https://www.kidzherald.com/the-colourful-tale-of-cricket-jerseys-why-whites-in-tests-and-colours-in-odis-and-t20s/)

This tradition disregards the needs of women cricketers, especially during menstruation. Many female players have expressed their anxiety and unease about playing in white clothing during their periods. For example, Australian cricketer Alyssa Healy and England cricketer Georgia Elwiss have raised concerns about this, highlighting the stress it causes players during international matches. New Zealand wicketkeeper-batter Bernadine Bezuidenhout mentions in an interview "As a female athlete, you love not having your period. Like, no period - great, don't have to worry about the pain and all those other things. Can play a full game of cricket. It was something I kept from myself for a long time."[13] Menstruation is not a minor issue; it impacts female cricketers worldwide and exposes the male-centric nature of cricket's rules and traditions.

The governing bodies' disregard for this issue reflects the current status of women's cricket, where advancements in gender equality are superficial in some areas. While changes in language, such as using 'batter,' signify progress, other cultural and structural aspects of the game remain entrenched in tradition and are slow to change.

Do the media cover the Women's game differently?
Media coverage of women's sports in India has traditionally been inadequate. The media has a significant impact on a sport's popularity and public perception. Earlier, media played a crucial role in popularizing men's cricket in India through radio and later television. Various forms of media like books, newspapers, and magazines also contributed to the popularity of men's cricket. Television intensified the national passion for cricket and turned cricketers into national heroes. Media has played an important role in the growth of women's cricket as well, although the support has been much less extensive. Overall, men's cricket has been the main focus of Indian sports media coverage (Gupta R. , 2021).

Media plays another crucial role i.e. it increases fan base, on the other hand the fans also need media to get access to the sport, therefore to get women playing, it is important to show that women are playing (Gupta R. , 2021). The main reason why people do not watch women's sports is not a matter of personal choice but is rather due to a lack of TV coverage (Katsarova, 2019) .The World Cup has consistently influenced the rise in the sport's popularity. Watching women compete in the 2017 World Cup on TV altered the view. Cricket, once seen primarily as a passion pursuit, is now increasingly recognized as a viable career option for women. Despite these developments, coverage of men's cricket continues to be much higher. Media coverage of the 2013 Women's Cricket World Cup held in India was criticized as 'barely befitting of the name'. There was non-existent publicity and the scheduled matches were cancelled at the last moment to make way for men's matches (Gupta R. , 2021).

Insufficient promotion, advertising, financial support, and audience participation resulted in limited press attention and media coverage according to respondents. Respondents introduced the concept of "*asli cricket*" or real cricket, associated with men's cricket. Women's cricket was often

---

13 https://www.espncricinfo.com/story/why-cricket-is-tougher-for-women-in-more-ways-than-you-might-think-1378023

viewed as less competitive and less engaging by many respondents mostly male. One of the reasons posited for the poor coverage of women's cricket is the lack of interested advertisers[14], who do not find women's cricket a lucrative investment. The "media game" thus must shift for women's achievements to "count" i.e. truly be acknowledged and valued. Caroline O Donoghue argues that we need more stories about all women in sport. Stories of strength and prowess, of agility and teamwork, of good-humoured losses and triumphant, soaring wins (Donoghue, 2017).The introduction of women's T20 WPL has increased fan engagement and media coverage. The 2024 WPL was recently broadcasted on Jio Cinema and sports18 in India showcasing betterment in the Women's cricket[15]. Though this engagement was quiet less as compared to the IPL, one of the respondents, Ria argued that "Women's matches are not telecast on *main* sports channels unlike IPL". During the field work it was observed that many fans were making fun of the cricketing shots played, for instance, they were claiming reverse sweep as *ulti jhadoo maar di* (used the broom the wrong way). Many more dismissive and derogatory comments could be heard. Another observation was that during the WPL as well the fans were wearing T-shirts bearing names of Male cricket players like Virat Kohli and M S Dhoni.

Recent reforms
Structural issues have traditionally impacted the gender equality in cricket; in addition to this, it is then important to consider recent efforts and initiatives. The governing body for cricket in India Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announced that male and female cricket players will be paid an equal match fee as it seeks to promote gender equality in the country's most popular sport. As per the newly introduced system, the Indian women's cricketers will now receive Rs 15 lakh per Test, Rs 6 lakh per ODI, and Rs 3 lakh per T20I, the same as their male counterparts. "The match fee for both Men and Women Cricketers will be same as we move into a new era of gender equality in Cricket," Shah tweeted.[16]

The ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2024 will be the first ICC event where women will receive the same prize money as their male counterparts, marking a significant milestone in the sport's history. The decision was taken at the ICC Annual Conference in July 2023, when the ICC Board took the step of reaching its prize money equity target seven years ahead of its schedule of 2030, making cricket the only major team sport to have equal prize money for its men's and women's World Cup events.[17]

In October 2021, the ICC took a progressive step by replacing the term 'batsman' with the gender-neutral 'batter' across all formats, calling it a "natural and overdue evolution" of the sport. This

14 [With womens ICC World Twenty20 failing to get advertisers, Star India stalls marketing plans - The Economic Times (indiatimes.com)](#)

15 https://olympics.com/en/news/women-premier-league-2024-wpl-live-streaming-telecast-tv-channel
    Alternate names are utilized instead of the original names of the respondents to ensure anonymity.

16 https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/sports/bcci-bats-for-gender-equity-announces-equal-pay-for-men-and-women/articleshow/95118353.cms?from=mdr

17 https://www.icc-cricket.com/media-releases/icc-enters-era-of-equal-prize-money-for-men-and-women
    Alternate names are utilized instead of the original names of the respondents to ensure anonymity

change is now part of the official 'Laws of Cricket,' overseen by the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC), which only began 'admitting' women as members in 1998—over 200 years after its founding. However, many male commentators continue to resist using the term 'batter' and considering cricket as 'their' sport reflecting cricket's deeply rooted traditions and reluctance to change. This resistance highlights how language shapes and sustains societal power dynamics, mirroring and reinforcing existing inequalities. Kashish, a 20 year old mentions in her interview that "*commentary me aurton ko laya he kam jata hai, aur agr hoti h to unka mazak udaya jata hai*". This adds to the broader narrative of gender inequality within cricket, where even linguistic reforms like the use of 'batter' may not be sufficient to overcome deeply ingrained biases

Outcomes and Analysis

The data collected from the survey and interviews, revealed a striking trend in the socialization process within cricket. It was evident that the interest in cricket among respondents predominantly stemmed from watching their fathers and brothers play, with little to no influence from mothers. This pattern underscores the entrenched patriarchal dynamics within the domain of cricket, where familial roles contribute to shaping individuals' sporting interests and pursuits.

Moreover, the role of media, particularly through platforms like the IPL, emerged as a significant factor in garnering support and fostering fan engagement. The widespread advertisement and promotion of the IPL have effectively captured the attention of cricket enthusiasts, further perpetuating the dominance of male-centric narratives and structures within the sport.

A notable finding from the survey was the increasing following of women's cricket, particularly with the introduction of initiatives like the Women's Premier League (WPL). However, despite this positive trend, disparities in advertising, sponsorship, and funding persist, posing significant obstacles to the growth and development of women's cricket. Nevertheless, there is optimism that continued innovations and investments in the upcoming years could potentially improve the conditions and opportunities for female cricketers.

Interestingly, despite the efforts to promote women's cricket, the survey revealed a disappointing observation regarding fan engagement. Even during events like the WPL, there was a noticeable lack of female viewership on a significant scale. This disparity highlights the ongoing challenges in achieving gender parity in cricket fandom and underscores the importance of targeted initiatives to broaden and diversify the fan base, ensuring inclusivity and representation across genders.

Respondents acknowledged that female cricketers especially at lower levels face several challenges, including a scarcity of female coaches and dedicated academies, limited support from family for late-night practices, and inadequate funding from authorities. These obstacles hinder their development and opportunities within the sport, highlighting the need for greater investment and support systems to promote gender equality in cricket.

Conclusion

The ongoing gender disparity crisis within cricket underscores the profound and enduring inequalities that permeate the sport. Despite significant strides and growing visibility for women's cricket, the path to achieving genuine gender equality remains fraught with obstacles. Female

cricketers continue to face systemic challenges, including limited opportunities, insufficient resources, and entrenched patriarchal norms within cricketing institutions. These barriers are compounded by disparities in media coverage, traditional views, financial support, and societal attitudes that reinforce gender stereotypes and maintain existing power imbalances.

The historical framing of cricket as a predominantly male domain has contributed to the persistence of these disparities. Traditionally viewed as a 'gentleman's game,' cricket has upheld masculine ideals, thereby marginalizing women's participation and reinforcing the perception of cricket as inherently male. This historical and cultural backdrop has shaped the current landscape, where women's involvement in cricket is often perceived as secondary or inferior.

However, the gender disparity crisis also presents opportunities for significant transformation and progress. Addressing critical issues such as the lack of female coaches, inadequate support systems is essential for fostering a more inclusive environment within the sport. Cricketing authorities and stakeholders have the chance to drive change by implementing innovative strategies that challenge traditional gender norms and restructure institutional frameworks. These efforts should focus on promoting equal opportunities, enhancing visibility for women's cricket, and ensuring equitable resource allocation.

The persistence of traditional customs, like the requirement for all-white clothing in Test matches, and the resistance of influential individuals to accept these changes, indicates that cricket still has a significant journey ahead to achieve genuine inclusivity. Upon closer examination of these issues, it becomes evident that while there is some progress, it is crucial to question whether these endeavours will bring about lasting transformation or if they merely represent symbolic gestures that uphold the underlying patriarchal framework of cricket. Real change will necessitate full commitment from cricket authorities, media, and players to dismantle gender inequalities both in language and structure.

Furthermore, the increasing commodification of cricket, driven by private enterprises and media dynamics, offers both challenges and opportunities. While commodification has highlighted the commercial potential of the sport, it has also perpetuated gender biases through uneven media coverage and sponsorship. To counteract these effects, it is crucial to advocate for fair representation and support for women's cricket, leveraging media and market influence to foster greater inclusivity.

In conclusion, the pursuit of gender equality within cricket represents a critical step toward realizing the sport's potential for empowerment and social change. Through sustained efforts, innovative strategies, and a commitment to challenging entrenched norms, cricket can move towards a future where gender parity is not merely an aspiration but a tangible reality. This transformation will not only enhance the sport itself but also contribute to the broader goals of social justice and equity.

References

- Atkinson, M. (2015). Researching Sport. In R. Giulianotti (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of the Sociology of Sport* (pp. 8-17). Routledge .

- Birley, D. (1999). *A Social History of English Cricket*. aurum press.

- Burnett, C. (2001). Whose Game Is It Anyway? Power, Play and Sport. *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, 71-78.

- Delaney, K. J. (2015). Economic and Sociological Approaches to Sport. In R. Giulianotti (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of the Sociology of Sport* (pp. 133-141). Routledge.

- Donoghue, C. O. (2017, July 17). *Why don't we hear more about Indian women's cricket?* Retrieved from https://www.vogue.in/content/why-dont-we-hear-more-about-indian-womens-cricket

- Duncan, I. (2013). *Skirting the Boundary: A History of Women's Cricket*. London: The Robson Press.

- Durkheim, E. (2014). *The Division of Labor in Society*. Free Press.

- Gopal, M., & Prakash, P. (2021). Introduction; A sporting engagement. In M. Gopal, & P. Prakash, *sports studies in india expanding the field* (pp. 1-15). Oxford University Press.

- Gupta, R. (2021). Women's Cricket in India. In m. gopal, & p. prakash, *Sports Studies in India* (pp. 89-113). oxford university press.

- Gupta, R. (2021). Women's Cricket in India. In M. Gopal, & P. Prakash, *Sports Studies in India*. Oxford University Press.

- Humberstone, B. (2002). Femininity, masculinity and difference: what's wrong with a sarong? In A. Laker, & A. Laker (Ed.), *The Sociology of Sport and Physical Education* (pp. 58-78). Routledge Falmer.

- Humberstone, B. (n.d.). Femininity, masculinity and difference: what's wrong with a sarong? In A. Laker (Ed.). Routledge Falmer.

- joshi. (2020). Gender Disparity in Indian Cricket: An Analysis of Pay Structures for Male and Female Players. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, pp. 197-213.

- Joshi. (2020). Gender Disparity in Indian Cricket: An Analysis of Pay Structures for Male and Female Players. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, pp. 197-213.

- Katsarova, I. (2019). Gender equality in sport: Gettingcloser every day. *European Parliamentary Research Service*.

- Majumdar, B. (2004). *Twenty-two Yards to Freedom: A Social History of Indian Cricket*. Viking.

- Michela Musto, C. C. (2017, October). From Fizzle to Sizzle! Televised Sports News and the Production of Gender Bland Sexism. *Gender and Society*, 573-596.

- Naha, S. (2022). Gender, PPower, and Cricket Spectataors in Calcutta, 1960s-1990. *The Historical Journal*, 774-796.

- Parry, K. D., richards , J., Batey, J., & Khan, A. (n.d.). Walking the Walk:Gender-bland Sexism, The Fan Experience and Perceptions of Value in Women's Professional Cricket.
- Sharma, V. (2018). Is Cricket a Gender Biased Game? India in Relation to the World . *International Journal of Law Management and Humanities*.
- velija , p. (2015). *Women's Cricket and Global Process*. New York: Palgrave .
- Velija, P. (2015). Cricket and Masculinity in Early . In P. Velija, *Women's Cricket* (pp. 25-56). York St John University, UK.
- Vertinsky, P. A. (1994). Gender Relations, Women's History and Sport History: A Decade of Changing Enquiry,1983-1993. *Journal of Sport History, 21*, 1-24.
- Weber, M. (2013). *Economy and Society* (Vol. I). University of California Press.

II Fashioning Identity: Unmasking the Gendered Crisis in Fashion in the Quest for Self-Identity

Aanyaa Manas, Indraprastha College for Women, Delhi University[1]

Introduction: The Evolution and Impact of Gender-Neutral Fashion

The emergence of gender-neutral fashion is particularly visible among university students in Delhi, leading to a gender-bending approach that challenges traditional gender norms and contributes to the redefinition of social identities. This study explores the sociological implications of this phenomenon by examining fashion's role in constructing identity within India's unique cultural context. The focus on urban areas like Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru is intentional, as these cities are known to be cosmopolitan hubs and key spaces where global trends intersect with local traditions, making them fertile ground for understanding fashion's role in shaping identity. Thus, the research seeks to answer: What are the sociological implications of the "gender-bending" approach to fashion in the construction of social identity?

India offers a distinctive perspective because it sits at the crossroads of tradition and modernity. Rather than comparing luxury brands and independent designers, this research concentrates on gender-neutral fashion in India's urban centres as an accessible space for expressing gender and sexualities. The growing demand for inclusive fashion in these cities, supported by an expected compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6.5% in the gender-neutral clothing arena, underscores how fashion not only mirrors shifts in societal trends but also a strong force behind the redefinition of social identities.

The impact of this gender bending approach on men's clothing options has been profound, breaking down traditional fashion barriers while expanding self-expression through clothing.[1]

However, inclusivity is largely restricted to the upper-class, Savarna, and elite sections of the fashion industry. True inclusivity requires addressing these structural inequalities, ensuring that the freedom of expression extends beyond privileged groups and becomes accessible to all, regardless of socioeconomic status or caste.

The relationship between fashion and social identity has long been recognised, with clothing playing a significant role in shaping personal and cultural identities.[2] The emergence of androgynous fashion in India, influenced by the West and its cultural shifts, has further

---

1   Aanyaa is a sociology honors student at Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi. Her research explores the intersections of gender, fashion, and the construction of self-identity, with a focus on how systemic structures shape agency. She looks forward to exploring these themes in greater depth during her time at the University of Pennsylvania, further integrating criminological and sociological perspectives into her work.

1   *The Impact of gender-neutral fashion on men's clothing options.* (2023, April 28). Times of India Blog. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/the-style-chronicle/the-impact-of-gender-neutral-fashion-on-mens-clothing-options-53162/

2   I., & I. (2024, January 22). *Fashion and Identity: An Exploration of Clothing's Role in Shaping Personal and Cultural Identities.* IIAD. https://www.iiad.edu.in/ the-circle/fashion-and-identity-an-exploration-of-clothings-role-in-shaping-personal-and-cultural-identities/

contributed to the redefinition of these traditionally accepted norms. This evolving landscape of fashion and identity construction provides a rich context for exploring the sociological implications of the "gender-bending" approach to fashion. Fashion is thus, a multifaceted aspect of culture that expands beyond clothing styles.

In this context, the concept of 'crisis' arises not just as a descriptor of our current challenges but as an urgent call to re-evaluate and transform our understanding of fashion's role in shaping gender and identity. The term "crisis" serves as both a lens and a call to action. Crisis encapsulates the multifaceted challenges faced, particularly concerning gender and self-identity. This is not merely a transient disturbance, but rather a deep-rooted societal tension, underscored by the struggle to reconcile traditional norms with evolving expressions of identity. The gendered crisis elucidated in this research pertains to the persistent imbalance, discrimination, and restrictive constructs imposed on individuals based on gender within the fashion industry and its broader cultural impact. To better understand and address the gendered crisis at hand, the aim is to untangle the intricate connections between fashion, identity, and societal norms, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and genuine expression of oneself.

Literature Review

The existing literature on fashion, identity, and gender provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between clothing, self-expression, and societal norms. Entwistle's seminal work, "The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory," examines how fashion contributes to the construction and performance of identity in modern society, highlighting the dual impact of clothing on the individual body and its social aspects. Wilkinson-Weber's "Fashioning Bollywood: The Making and Meaning of Hindi Film Costume" delves into the significance of costume design in cinematic storytelling, cultural symbolism, and the negotiation of gender, ethnicity, and identity through sartorial representation.

Fashion as a Site of Resistance and Empowerment: Dhar and Chakraborty's article, "Reimagining Gender in Delhi's Queer Fashion Spaces," offers a profound analysis of the intersection between gender identity and fashion expression within the context of Delhi's queer community. Their research sheds light on the transformative power of fashion as a tool for self-expression and identity construction among individuals with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. The authors demonstrate how queer individuals in Delhi utilize fashion as a form of agency and empowerment to challenge and redefine conventional gender norms.

The Gender Politics of Fashion: Goble's article, "The Gender Politics of Dressing: A Feminist Perspective on the Fashion Industry," provides a critical analysis of the fashion industry from a feminist standpoint. The study sheds light on the role of fashion in shaping individual and collective identities, particularly in relation to gender expression and self-presentation. Goble's examination highlights the potential for clothing to be a site of resistance and subversion against gendered expectations, while also acknowledging the fashion industry's role in perpetuating and challenging traditional gender norms. This dynamic is further complicated by the intersections of caste and class, which can either reinforce or disrupt prevailing norms of fashion and identity in India.

Research Gaps and Future Directions: While the existing literature offers valuable insights into the relationship between fashion, identity, and gender, there are still gaps in the research. Most of the studies focus on specific contexts, such as Bollywood cinema or the queer community in Delhi, leaving room for further exploration of fashion's impact on gender norms and identity construction in other cultural settings. Additionally, further exploration is needed into how caste, class, and gender intersect within these contexts, as the literature would be significantly enriched by adopting a more intersectional approach, exploring how elements such as race, class, and age interconnect with gender in shaping fashion choices and identity formation.

Methodology

Delhi's vibrant and diverse cultural landscape makes it an ideal focus for this research. As a melting pot of traditions, modernity, and global influences, the city offers a rich context for exploring the intersection of fashion and identity. Its dynamic queer community actively redefines gender norms through fashion, serving as a powerful medium for self-expression and empowerment. Additionally, Delhi's ongoing social and political transformations provide a unique backdrop for analyzing gender identity complexities in contemporary Indian society. This research aims to uncover how local cultural practices and global fashion trends converge to shape individual identities and challenge societal expectations.

This research utilizes a mixed-methods approach to examine the complex interplay between fashion and identity within the LGBTQ+ community in India, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods to offer a holistic understanding of how clothing choices reflect and shape personal and cultural identities among queer individuals. In-depth interviews with a diverse sample of participants from various cultural backgrounds will capture personal narratives and lived experiences, offering rich, contextual insights. Concurrently, a survey distributed to a broader demographic will gather statistical data on fashion preferences, clothing-related discrimination, and the impact of fashion on self-perception and social interactions. This methodological triangulation enhances the fortitude of these findings and allows for a nuanced exploration of the dynamic interplay between fashion, identity, and societal norms within India.

This research adopted an integrated research design to explore the interplay between fashion, gender, and self-identity. Qualitative methods are well-suited to capture the nuanced experiences, perceptions, and meanings associated with fashion and identity. The research approach was primarily deductive, drawing on existing theories and concepts from sociology and fashion studies to guide the analysis. Additionally, the study incorporated an inductive approach to facilitate the discovery of novel insights and emerging themes discovered during the primary research phase.

Online surveys were conducted with a sample of college students and working professionals within the fashion industry, such as fashion students, designers, and business owners. The survey gathered qualitative data on participants' attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives related to fashion and gender identity. Survey distribution utilized social media platforms, online forums, and mailing lists frequented by young adults in fashion institutes in Delhi. The study employed both purposive and snowball sampling methods to recruit participants, administering an online survey designed to be completed within 15 to 20 minutes. The analysis focuses on responses from the open-ended

survey questions and then undertakes a thematic analysis by carefully reading through the responses, identifying recurring patterns and themes, and organizing the data into meaningful categories. Quantitative data from the close-ended survey questions are analyzed using descriptive statistics. Calculating frequencies and percentages provide insights into the prevalence and distribution of attitudes and behaviors related to fashion and gender identity. Reflexivity has been maintained throughout the research process by actively recognizing and accounting for personal biases, assumptions, and positionalities that could impact data collection and interpretation.

Data Analysis
Table 1 presents the demographics of the participants involved in the in-depth survey. This includes information on their age and gender identity.

Table 1 *Demographics*

Age Group	Percentage	Gender	Percentage
16-20 years	40%	Male	26.7%
20-35 years	33.3%	Female	73.3%
35+ years	26.7%	Prefer not to say	-

Objective-type Questions Analysis
The key themes that emerged from the survey are:
1. **Role of Fashion in Shaping Personal Identity**
   Majority of the respondents (73.3%) believe that fashion plays a major role in shaping their personal identity, indicating a strong connection between clothing choices and self-perception. However, a minority (13.3%) believe fashion has a minor role, while another 13.3% believe it has no role at all in shaping their identity.

2. **Impact of Fashion on Societal Perceptions of Gender**
   Most respondents (66.7%) believe fashion has a significant impact on societal perceptions of gender, suggesting clothing choices are crucial in shaping how gender is perceived within society. The remaining 33.3% believe fashion has some influence on gender perceptions.

3. **Factors Influencing Fashion Choices**
   The classification of factors has been done keeping in mind the internal and external sources of influence which help distinguish between autonomous decision-making and socially driven adoption. These factors are:
   - Personal preference (86.7%) which includes taste, comfort, and self-expression.
   - Media influence (60%) which includes social media, advertisements, and celebrity endorsements.
   - Peer influence (53.3%) which includes friends, colleagues, and social circles.

4. **Role of Fashion Industry in Challenging/Reinforcing Gender Norms**
   The majority (60%) believe the fashion industry plays a dual role, both challenging and reinforcing traditional gender norms. 20% perceive the industry as primarily challenging norms, while 6.7% believe it predominantly reinforces them. 13.3% see the industry as neither significantly challenging nor reinforcing gender norms.

5. **Navigating Individuality and Societal Expectations**
   Most respondents (53.3%) navigate the balance between expressing individuality and conforming to societal expectations by striving for a balance between the two. 40% prioritize expressing individuality through fashion, while 6.7% prioritize conforming to societal expectations.

6. **Role of Fashion Influencers**
   The majority (80%) believe 'fashion influencers' on social media play a major role in shaping contemporary fashion trends and gender perceptions, while 20% perceive their role as minor.

7. **Recommendations for Fostering Inclusivity**
   Key recommendations for the fashion industry to foster inclusivity and diversity include:
   - Promoting gender-neutral clothing options (40%)
   - Featuring diverse models in campaigns (26.7%)
   - Expanding size inclusivity (20%)
   - Implementing all the above (13.3%)

Subjective-type Questions Analysis
Participants frequently mentioned feeling empowered when their fashion choices allowed them to express their true selves without fear of judgment. For example, one participant reflected on wearing a bold, vibrant outfit that captured their personality and style, celebrating their identity as a fashion law and international trade student. This act of self-expression was not only a personal milestone but also reinforced by positive feedback from others, further affirming their unique style. Another notable insight was the blending of cultural heritage with modern professional identity. One participant described wearing an outfit to a fashion tech conference in Mumbai that combined traditional Indian textiles with contemporary, tech-inspired elements. This fusion of tradition and innovation celebrated their dual identity as both a fashion enthusiast and a technologist, showcasing a seamless integration of different aspects of their identity through fashion. The ability to express individuality within a professional context was also highlighted. A participant recounted wearing a bold, tailored suit with vibrant accessories during a conference presentation. This choice celebrated their professional identity as a professor while also embracing their personal style and confidence.

Several participants discussed how fashion helped them embrace and celebrate their femininity on their own terms. One respondent mentioned that dressing according to personal taste allowed them to break free from societal expectations and build confidence. The sense of belonging to a community was another insight. Participants noted that college environments, where diverse fashion choices are common, fostered a feeling of inclusivity and freedom. One participant mentioned that dressing up for college and observing others doing the same made them feel part of a community that encourages experimentation and self-expression.
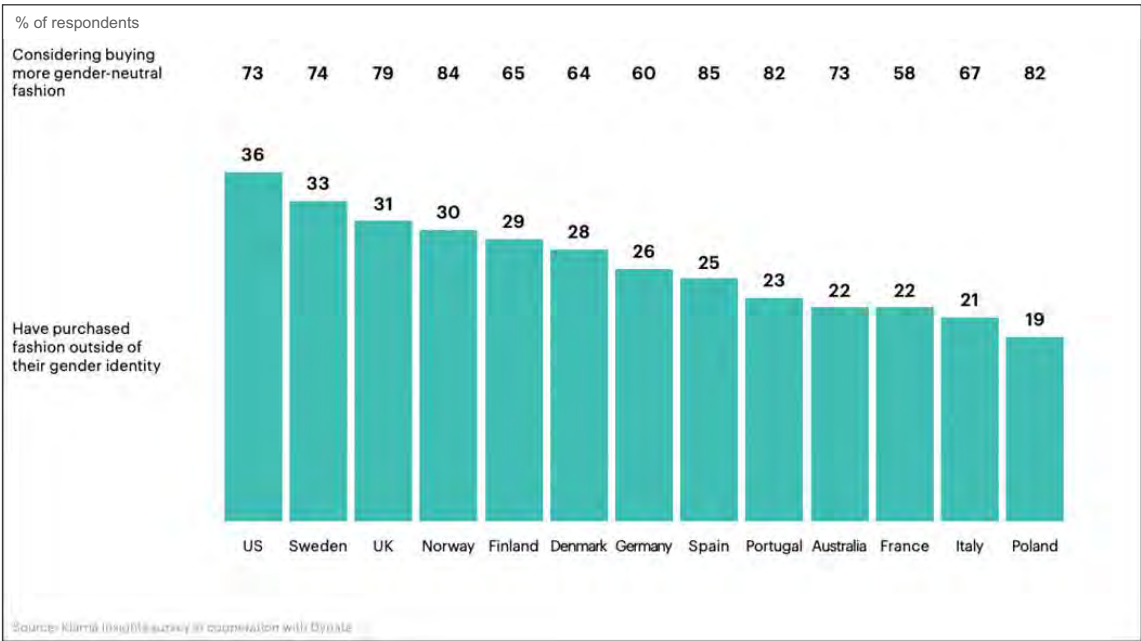
Participants acknowledged that while the industry has made notable strides towards inclusivity, there remains significant room for improvement. For instance, some respondents emphasized that despite the increased visibility of diverse models and efforts to feature various gender identities in campaigns and runway shows, the industry often falls short in fully reflecting the spectrum of identities. This includes the need for more inclusive designs, marketing strategies, and workplace cultures that genuinely embrace and celebrate all gender identities. The visibility and opportunities for non-binary, genderqueer, and transgender individuals are still lacking, both in front of and behind the camera, suggesting that deeper systemic changes are required to achieve true inclusivity.

Respondents pointed out that social prejudices continue to influence how gender diversity is portrayed in fashion. For example, the pressure to conform to traditional gender norms can stifle creative expression and limit the industry's ability to develop clothing styles that truly reflect a wide range of identities. Some participants also noted that societal expectations often dictate how individuals dress, reinforcing gender roles and restricting personal expression. Despite these challenges, there is a sense of optimism, particularly among the younger generation, who are seen as driving a shift towards a more inclusive and ungendered approach to fashion. These insights underscore the importance of continued efforts to challenge and dismantle gender stereotypes within the fashion industry, paving the way for a more inclusive and representative future.

Discussion and Core Concepts
Gender-Neutral Fashion
Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, and attributes that a society considers appropriate for individuals based on their perceived sex. Unlike biological sex which is determined by physical characteristics, gender is a cultural and social construct that varies across different societies and time periods. Gender-neutral is a concept that transcends traditional binary notions of gender and instead emphasises inclusivity and fluidity. Challenging rigid categorisation of individuals into distinct roles and norms based on one's gender, this concept acknowledges that gender exists along a spectrum rather than a binary (see Figure 1).

% of respondents

	US	Sweden	UK	Norway	Finland	Denmark	Germany	Spain	Portugal	Australia	France	Italy	Poland
Considering buying more gender-neutral fashion	73	74	79	84	65	64	60	85	82	73	58	67	82
Have purchased fashion outside of their gender identity	36	33	31	30	29	28	26	25	23	22	22	21	19

Source: Klarna Insights survey in cooperation with Dynata

"Genderless" clothing is being designed without a specific colour or texture in mind and is being designed to fit a larger variety of body types and sizes; the fashion is "fluid," not masculine or feminine so to say. One of the main factors upon which preference in clothing depends is comfort; women's clothing has historically been said to be uncomfortable to be worn for longer periods of time which becomes one of the main reasons as to why women look for more comfortably fitting clothes in the men's section (Industries, 2024).

For the fashion industry from an economic point of view, going gender-less can be beneficial since design, fabrics and patterns aren't inherently male or female; by taking this route brands can cut costs on design time, sourcing fabric, and manufacturing. Fast fashion is slowly losing traction and shoppers are looking for more sustainable and ethically sourced apparel. Whether a genderless fashion showcase at Lakme Fashion Week or the country's judicial system taking monumental steps to propagate inclusivity, the Indian fashion industry is steering away from the archaic gender binary. As younger consumers demand a disruption of the fashion binary, brands ranging from Gucci to Target are listening, the key industry players are said to be witnessing a seismic shift in the trends, there is a widening acceptance of a style with no boundaries. Examining the role of designers who challenge these binaries is crucial to understand the shift, one of the many is Kallol Datta whose avant-garde approach exemplifies the same.

Fashion as a tool of Resistance: Kallol Datta 1955
Kallol Datta is renowned for his genderless, anti-fit conceptual designs, which have been characterized as a fusion of fashion and art. He was up in a Middle Eastern setting where politics was central to fashion, and his studies at NIFT and Central Saint Martins in London gave him the skills he needed to give his ideas shape. He then started his own label, "Kallol Datta 1955". "People who claim that politics should be kept out of the applied arts are absurd, in my opinion, because our clothing immediately and visibly identifies our civilizations. Even though the final customer might not care about a garment's origins" Kallol Datta said in an interview (P. S., & P. S. 2019). Kallol adds: "As a creator, I think it's important that my product reflects my mindset". Datta is comfortable using the term of clothes-maker and has never identified as a fashion designer. He sees clothing and fashion as both political and democratic. The significance of aesthetics in resistance and clothing as locations of tension have been his main areas of interest in recent years. Since its inception, "clothing is political," since the dominant majority has utilized it to scare, oppress, and enslave minorities.

Exploring Gender and Sexual Identity through Style
Clothing choices provide insights into one's gender expression and possibly their sexuality but it's important to acknowledge that they don't definitively determine either. As seen through the survey also, people express themselves through their clothing due to various reasons like cultural influences, personal preferences, and individual style. Jacob Moscovitch from the Vox Magazine says that their "wardrobe" connected them to generations of queer people who commandeered fashion as their own weapon for equality. The "handkerchief code," according to 'Bob Darmon's Address Book' was a way for gay men in the 1970s to communicate their sexual availability and preferences, not to say that everything about coded clothing and sexuality is true-but it is to say that clothes are more than just fabrics stitched together.

For many people their outward expression of gender does go directly with their clothing choices, and it is one of the quickest ways to express and reflect what one feels on the inside on the outside. Many transgender people and a lot of the people in the LGBTQ+ community, according to Dani Majors, are aware of this function of clothing since they're so desperate for adequate means of expression.

For people who identify as non-binary, dressing more androgynously led to their "dress evolution". Wearing clothes that made a body look more malleable to the outward eye, serves as a matter of safety too. Androgynous clothing provides a degree of anonymity and protection in environments and surroundings where gender non-conformity is not accepted. This is also done in order to avoid being misgendered or pigeonholed into the traditional binary.

Other than clothing, there are ways people alter their physical appearances to fit their gender identity. Historically, the industry has been slow to recognise and embrace gender diversity, the lack of inclusivity leads to exclusion and marginalisation within the industry itself. The industry is said to play a significant role in perpetuating beauty standards which prioritise certain body types, facial features, and other physical characteristics that make the people not possessing the same feel "not beautiful".

Access to clothing, cosmetics and other related products can be limited by economic factors. Transitioning or expressing one's gender identity through alterations to physical appearance requires financial resources which includes medical procedures too. According to a study by the National Center for Transgender Equality, 29% of the group live in utmost poverty in the US and seeing that only 48% transgender individuals in India are working, highlighting the financial challenges people face when accessing clothing and grooming products necessary for gender expression. According to Magnus Media, the majority of transgender people cannot afford the hefty cost of Sex Reassignment Surgeries (SRS) at private hospitals or clinics, which range from Rs 2 to Rs 5 lakh for an MTF transition and Rs 4 to Rs 8 lakh for an FTM transition (Magnus Media, India). This financial barrier not only limits access to necessary medical services but also affects individuals' ability to find clothing that aligns with their gender identity. A survey conducted by the LGBTQ+ advocacy group GLAAD found that 60% of respondents struggle to find clothing that reflects their gender identity, with financial constraints cited as a significant factor. The stark contrast between the high costs of SRS and the lack of affordable, gender-affirming clothing underscores the urgent need for greater accessibility to medical services at the broader level and fashion options at the personal level for the transgender community.

Global consumers are purchasing fashion in the womenswear and menswear categories, with American customers in the forefront. However, the embrace of gender-fluid fashion is often complicated by cultural differences among markets. To authentically acknowledge gender as a socially constructed and fluid concept, it is essential for fashion leaders to adopt inclusive language and terminology, steering away from binary classifications such as 'male' and 'female' in discussions of gender identity, except when contextual specificity is warranted. By fostering diverse workforces, companies can enhance their understanding of gender diversity and ensure that their initiatives are not merely tokenistic.

The quest for self-identity through fashion begins with self-awareness and authenticity. Every garment selected communicates a silent yet bold narrative about personal values, beliefs, and in some sense oppression or freedom. Psychological models of fashion highlight factors like conformity, need for variation; sociological models emphasise the impact on cultural phenomena and social mobility. The ethical and sustainable fashion movement offers a pathway for individuals to align their clothing choices with their values, by keeping the focus on sustainability, fair labour practices, and environmental impact, individuals have started to express their commitment to responsible consumption and environmental stewardship.

Crisis in the Fashion Industry

The fashion industry, a multibillion-dollar global enterprise encompasses a wide range of endeavours focused on designing, producing, promoting, and distributing clothing and accessories. Grounded in artistic expression, aesthetics, and garment craftsmanship, this industry epitomises the prevailing styles and fashion trends embraced by diverse demographics. Traditionally segmented into "high fashion" and mass-market apparel, fashion has undergone evolution, with distinctions between luxury designer wear and everyday attire becoming increasingly blurred over time.

Historically, prior to the mid-19th century, clothing was mainly crafted by hand for individuals, reflecting a personalised approach to garment creation. In India, for instance, this era saw the intricate weaving of textiles and the use of traditional craftsmanship to create garments that held cultural significance. In the context of Delhi's queer spaces, this historical evolution underscores the importance of understanding how global fashion trends intersect with local cultural practices, affecting the ways in which gender identity and self-expression are articulated through clothing.
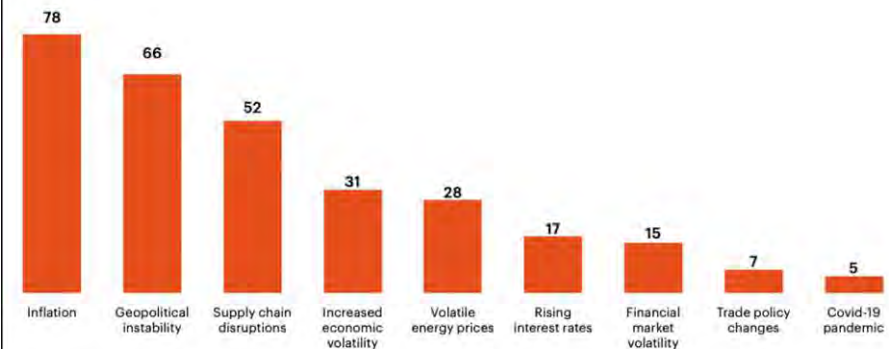
However, the introduction of technological advancements such as the sewing machine, coupled with the emergence of global capitalism and the expansion of retail networks, led to a shift towards mass production in clothing manufacturing. This transition marked a significant modernisation of the fashion industry, paving the way for its globalisation and internationalisation.

Today, the fashion industry operates on a global scale, with design, production, and distribution processes often spanning across multiple countries. For instance, a fashion brand procures materials from one country, manufactures garments in another, and distributes them worldwide. This intricate network of production and distribution highlights the industry's complexity and interconnectedness across national borders.

Several crises and challenges have emerged in the industry that stem majorly from complex interactions with society, these include aspects such as labour practices, environmental impact, cultural appropriation, and issues of representation. The fashion industry has long been centred around the binary notions of gender with separate categories for men's and women's clothing lines, runway shows, etc. However, as the society becomes more aware and accepting of the gender diversity present, in reality, the industry's adherence to these norms is increasingly seen as outdated and exclusionary (see Figure 2).

Inflation, geopolitical instability and supply chain disruptions are the top risks for fashion businesses in 2023, far eclipsing Covid-19

Top three risks to fashion businesses in 2023,
% of respondents

Inflation	Geopolitical instability	Supply chain disruptions	Increased economic volatility	Volatile energy prices	Rising interest rates	Financial market volatility	Trade policy changes	Covid-19 pandemic
78	66	52	31	28	17	15	7	5

Source: BoF-McKinsey State of Fashion 2023 Survey

By adhering to the binary set, they exclude and simultaneously marginalise individuals whose identities do not fit into these two categories. The lack of inclusive clothing options has economic repercussions for the fashion industry. Economic downturns, like the global financial crisis of 2007-2009 and the recent challenges posed due to COVID-19 pandemic, have affected the same.

These lead to change in consumer behaviour, with people becoming more reserved in spending and shifting towards mid-range fashion retail shops and small/thrift businesses. The global nature of the fashion industry's supply chain poses challenges in the sense that disruptions in production, delays in shipping, and the impact of global events brings into light the vulnerabilities of a supply chain that sources materials and labour from various countries. The fragmentation complicates the coordination and responsiveness, each node in the supply chain operates within a regulatory framework and cultural context. The prevalent adoption of just–in–time manufacturing practises in the fashion industry leaves minimal room for buffering against unforeseen disruptions.

Breaking away from the traditional binary gender norms unleashes new creative possibilities and drives innovation within this industry. It's also a question of social responsibility and ethical practice; it serves as a powerful platform to influence societal attitudes towards gender and promote acceptance. CSR or the Corporate Social Responsibility then emerges as a tool to mitigate future global crises in fashion where companies can address social and environmental challenges, enhance crisis management strategies through codified law and rules.

Advocacy and activism within the fashion industry are playing a crucial role in challenging the heteronormative standards for promoting greater inclusivity. The fashion industry has long perpetuated narrow definitions of gender, often marginalizing those who do not conform to traditional norms. This has created an environment where individuals who identify as non-binary, genderqueer, or otherwise outside the binary face significant barriers in representation and acceptance. According to a report by The Fashion Spot, the Spring 2022 fashion campaigns featured the most racially diverse cast of models to date, with 48.1% of models being people of colour. These efforts in advocacy are amplified through social media platforms and the

"influencers." Data from a study by Hootsuite reveals that Instagram is the most popular platform for fashion brands, with over 1 billion active users. This vast audience provides a unique opportunity for marginalized voices to gain visibility, share their stories, and mobilize support for more inclusive practices within the industry.

The democratising nature of social media enables marginalised voices to challenge dominant industry norms and demand greater inclusivity; Hashtags such as #GenderQueerFashion and #LGBTQStyle serve as digital rallying points, allowing individuals to share their experiences, showcase their identities, and connect with like-minded communities globally. Robert Cordero's in-depth analysis on "How Gen-Z is Propelling Gender-Fluid Fashion" he notes that, "Young consumers have been pivotal in breaking down barriers to greater acceptance of non-binary identity, including how it is embraced in fashion. Gen-Z may not be seeking out gender-neutral fashion explicitly but choosing to interact with brands in a less restrictive way than generations past".

While Gen-Z may not explicitly seek out gender-neutral fashion, they engage with brands in a less restrictive way than previous generations. This generational shift reflects broader societal changes in the understanding of gender as a fluid concept rather than a rigid binary. Moreover, Gen-Z is translating their vision of the world into fashion uniquely; increasingly, they see themselves as co-creators, actively participating in the ideation of new styles rather than passively waiting for brands to dictate the next big trends. This active engagement empowers them to redefine traditional aesthetics and challenge the status quo, thus influencing the direction of the fashion industry. Over the past decade, brands have been experimenting to understand what works and what doesn't in fluid fashion shopping experiences across various price points.

Delhi, the Queer Community, and the Fashion Scene
Since the city's inception, there has been a queer subculture that has developed as a space of resistance to the prevailing narrative. This aforementioned subculture includes locations such as the Indian Coffee House and the People's Tree, which fostered a burgeoning queer movement, and Delhi's Regal Cinema in Connaught Place, which witnessed the first-ever public protest by LGBTQ individuals in 1998. The gay community's oral history is just as significant as its written records. There were and still are several gay cruising spots in the city; a few metres outside the Jama Masjid metro station lies a park where a wrestling match is held every Sunday, it is also a gay cruising spot, it is often frequented by working class men seeking sex. Around Kashmere Gate, the public urinals and parks are spots too.

In India, voluntary sex work is still illegal. The Immoral Trafficking (Prevention) Act (ITPA) makes it illegal to engage in related acts such public solicitation and renting out property for sex work. Both their clients and the cops still take advantage of sex workers. Thus, informal support systems play a vital role in maintaining the livelihoods of sex workers. Muhammad Sheeraz's research on Hijra Farsi, a language used by transgender groups in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India, indicates that it is still a secret language. Transgender people from the Hijra community, who are locally referred to as Sartrebaaz or suit-salwar wale, solicit sex services at the area's traffic crossroads.

Traditionally Hijras have a distinct style of clothing that blends various elements of masculinity and femininity where they often wear bright coloured sarees or traditional female attire combined

with masculine accessories such as beards or turbans. The significance of clothing for the Hijra community extends itself to the fact that it serves as a symbolic marker of their identity.

At this point in the paper, discussing the Hijra community is essential for illustrating the nuanced ways in which fashion operates as both a source of oppression and a means of empowerment. This complexity underscores the broader arguments presented earlier regarding the fluidity of identity and the socio-cultural constraints that inform fashion choices. Understanding the Hijra community's unique position within the larger discourse of fashion and identity allows for a deeper exploration of how marginalized groups redefine norms and assert their individuality in the face of systemic barriers.

In this sense, fashion becomes a tool of resistance and self-definition, enabling them to assert their presence and challenge societal norms despite the constraints they face. This exploration of fashion within the Hijra community ultimately illustrates the broader implications of identity politics and societal structures that shape marginalized experiences.

For the sex workers out of the Hijra community and in general, fashion can represent a complex interplay of restriction and liberation. On one hand, societal stigma and legal constraints often limit their clothing preferences and pushes them towards clothing that conceals their identity and profession; there is a forced prioritisation of anonymity over free self-expression. However, since their work isn't legally considered to be a profession, they feel a sense of empowerment and agency through their clothing choices; dressing in a way that exudes confidence or even catering to a clients' preferences, sex workers may enhance their earning potential in an otherwise exploitative environment for the body and the mind.

A vibrant and evolving demographic within the LGBTQ+ spectrum in Delhi includes the youth. More than 30 people from different Delhi colleges and universities attended a General Body Meeting organised by the Student's Federation of India (SFI) for young people under 25 who identify as queer. According to a National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) poll in Delhi, just 15.12% of transgender people had finished their 10th and 12th grade education, while 5.33% had a bachelor's or graduate degree.

Data from the World Bank report on LGBTQIA students in Delhi campuses suggests that the queer movement in India, including university spaces, may exhibit an urban bias with upper-class influences which eventually impact the inclusivity and diversity of identities within educational settings. The studies on "coming out" experiences among the community's youth even today, reveal the nuances of societal acceptance and family dynamics. The fear of dismantling family values, the concern regarding traditions and the clash between Western influences and "Indian" culture contribute to the hidden navigation of life done by majority of the students here.

Akhil Katyal, in *The Doubleness of Sexuality*, talks about the way queerness is always juxtaposed being both visible and invisible, accepted, and marginalised, local and global. Arguing that homosexuality is a term that limits the actuality of the overlapping expressions of same-sex desires in the country; sexuality is therefore said to be characterised by a 'doubleness' rendering gay and

lesbian identities inherently open-ended. This sets the foundation of how we understand sexualities today.

Delhi is more than just a setting; it is an active player in the conversation around gender-neutral fashion, representing the hopes and conflicts of its multicultural population. The city's growing queer community openly questions long-standing gender stereotypes by using fashion as a powerful tool for empowerment and self-expression. The city's status as a cosmopolitan center, where international fashion trends collide with regional cultural customs, enhances this changing landscape even more and creates an atmosphere that is conducive to a critical analysis of how clothing choices affect one's sense of self. Delhi is a crucial location for comprehending the subtleties of gender and identity in modern India since it serves as both a study location and a microcosm of larger social changes.

Conclusion
In conclusion, this research illuminates the profound relationship between fashion and identity within the Delhi, highlighting fashion's transformative power as a vehicle for self-expression, cultural integration, and social change. The narratives and data analysed in this study reveal not only the personal empowerment that arises from fashion choices but also the broader societal implications of these individual acts of expression. As participants recount moments of confidence and liberation through their attire, it becomes evident that fashion is far more than a mere aesthetic concern; it is a dynamic language of identity and resistance, capable of challenging and reshaping societal norms.

The study highlights the pressing need for the industry to move beyond tokenistic gestures of inclusivity and towards a genuine embrace of diverse identities. While strides have been made, the persistence of traditional gender norms and societal taboos continues to stifle the industry's potential to fully reflect the spectrum of human identities. This calls for a radical rethinking of fashion design, marketing, and workplace culture, ensuring that inclusivity is ingrained at every level.

The findings from this research provoke important questions about the future of fashion and its role in shaping and reflecting societal values. How can we ensure that the narratives of marginalized communities, such as the Hijra, are not just included but celebrated in the mainstream? How can the industry harness its immense cultural influence to foster a more inclusive and diverse representation of gender identities? As we ponder these questions, it becomes clear that the journey towards true inclusivity in fashion is not merely a trend but a necessary evolution. This study opens new avenues for exploration and advocacy, urging stakeholders across

the fashion ecosystem to actively participate in this transformative journey.

References

- Amed, O., & Cordero, A. (2023). The State of Fashion 2023. McKinsey & Company. Retrieved from https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/the-state-of-fashion-2023.
- B., A., & B., A. (2024, March 8). Queer and Trans Community Pushes for Representation in Electoral Politics. The Mooknayak English - Voice of the Voiceless. https://en.themooknayak.com/lgbtq-news/queer-and-trans-community-pushes-for-representation-in-electoral-politics
- Crane, D. (2000). Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing. University of Chicago Press.
- Dhar, A., & Chakraborty, S. (n.d.). Reimagining Gender in Delhi's Queer Fashion Spaces.
- Entwistle, J. (2000). The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory. Polity Press.
- Fashion and Identity: An Exploration of Clothing's Role in Shaping Personal and Cultural Identities. (n.d.). IIAD. https://www.iiad.edu.in/the-circle/fashion-and-identity-an-exploration-of-clothings-role-in-shaping-personal-and-cultural-identities/
- Fashion Identity Expression LGBTQ Gender Outfits. (n.d.). Vox Magazine.
- Gender Neutral or Androgynous Fashion and Its History in India. (n.d.). IIAD.
- Hofbauer, D. (2021, May 27). The power of dress: Expressing gender identity through fashion. Vox Magazine.
- I., & I. (2024, January 22). Fashion and Identity: An Exploration of Clothing's Role in Shaping Personal and Cultural Identities. IIAD. https://www.iiad.edu.in/the-circle/fashion-and-identity-an-exploration-of-clothings-role-in-shaping-personal-and-cultural-identities/
- Industries, F. (2024, August 22). *apparel — Family Industries — Print and Merch Shop Blog*. *Family Industries*. https://family-industries mpef.squarespace.com/blog/category/apparel
- Kapoor, B. S. (2023, June 7). The Rise of Gender-Neutral Segment in Fashion | Apparel Resources. Apparel Resources. https://apparelresources.com/business-news/retail/rise- gender-neutral-segment-fashion/
- Karmakar, A. D. (2023, November 10). A Ramble Through Delhi's Queer History, Told Through Monuments and Subcultures. BehanBox. https://behanbox.com/a-ramble-through-delhis-queer-history-told-through-monuments-and-subcultures/
- Kim, J., Cho, Y., & Park, H. (2022, March 5). Analyzing genderless fashion trends of consumers' perceptions on social media: using unstructured big data analysis through Latent Dirichlet Allocation-based topic modeling. National Library of Medicine. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8901394/
- Makhija, V. (2022, July 15). Kallol Datta launches an investigation on the politics of clothing in his latest exhibition. Vogue India.
- P. S., & P. S. (2019, February 22). The Avant Garde, Genderless Designs of Kallol Datta. Homegrown.
- *Self-Expression through fashion and confidence*. (n.d.). AIM ATTITUDE. Retrieved January
- 14, 2024, from https://aimattitude.com/self-expression-through-fashion-and- confidence/
- UNDP. (2016). Skilling for Livelihood Opportunities for Transgenders in India. In United Nations Development Programme. United Nations Development Programme.
- Zehra, Daria, & Joar. (2023, May 30). Staying Elegant Whilst Navigating CSR in a Stormy World of Crisis Within the Fashion Industry. In Diva Portal.org. Malardalens University.

III The Bloody Rite of Passage: Feminism and The Menace of Menopause

Chetna Rani and Jigeesha Bhargavi[1], Hindu College, University of Delhi[2]

Introduction

"One's mind becomes like a skipping disc; it loses some parts while anxiously and obsessively repeating others; I also experience those fractions of seconds, particularly while driving when I don't know exactly where I am and how to get to my destination. That's minor; the real problem is when you totally lose control; I often find myself screaming my head off not only at my husband, which is understandable but also at my very close friends and work colleagues" (Amiry, 2010), shares Aida, renowned Palestinian author Suad Amiry's friend in Amiry's book, 'Menopausal Palestine: Women at the Edge'. Aida isn't the mad woman in the attic. She is going through something much more troublesome. It's a nuisance really - menopause. Suad Amiry's groundbreaking book Menopausal Palestine centres on the close-knit solidarity between 8 middle-aged women who are perimenopausal or menopausal. It is a revolutionary book, an inconvenient read, for it talks boisterously about a bodily change that hardly finds mention in our conversations - menopause. Men don't know it exists; women only find out about it from other women going through it.

Medically, menopause refers to the cessation of menstrual cycles in menstruators around the age of 40- 55. Menopause onset is defined clinically as the final menses, confirmed after 1 year without menstruation when the ovaries stop releasing eggs and oestrogen (World Health Organization: WHO, 2024). Perimenopause refers to the transitional period of a few years leading to menopause when people experience physiological changes like irregular periods, hot flashes, (a sudden feeling of warmth that spreads over the body), night sweats and/or cold flashes, vaginal dryness and loss of libido, insomnia and emotional fluctuations (irritability and mood swings). However, it is prudent to note that contrary to popular notions, these symptoms are not universal and vary on cross-cultural or individual bases. In this paper, we aim to understand the role and image of postmenopausal women. The lens of our understanding is twofold: Society (mapped through the history of the medical field, media-market construction, and state response) and Women (mapped through the conversations with our research participants and the literature available).

Feminine Forever?: Society's View of Menopause
A history of medical misogyny

The conceptualization and general discourse around menopause have not been static. It has evolved, changing over decades of contested notions. The term menopause was coined in 1821 by French physician Charles-Pierre-Louis de Gardanne and finds root in the Greek words 'menes' which means month and 'pausis' - cessation (Louis et al., n.d.). Pre-modern descriptions of menopause are not common, possibly because average life expectancy during that time was such

---

1 Chetna Rani is a third-year student pursuing BA(H) Political Science at Hindu College, University of Delhi. She nurtures an avid interest in contemporary literature and pop culture.

2 Jigeesha Bhargavi is a third-year student pursuing BA(H) Political Science at Hindu College, University of Delhi. She likes reading about gender, culture and bodies.

that the majority of women died before reaching menopause. In ancient Greece, Aristotle wrote about the age range of 40 to 50 between which women stopped having menstrual discharge and subsequently lost the ability to bear children (Diers, 1970). The lack of research and engagement around this bodily function shrouded it in mystery and ignorance. It was widely believed in the Victorian era in the 19th century that the connection between the womb and the brain made women vulnerable to insanity. Menopausal women suffered from what was then known as "climacteric insanity" - the symptoms of which included depression, sleeplessness, restlessness, and anxiety (Waltz, 2022). Branded senile and lunatic, they were then locked up in asylums as a solution.

This narrative gained further impetus in the late 20th century when the biomedical conception of menopause branded it as an oestrogen deficiency disease that needed correction through Hormone Replacement Therapy - HRT (using synthetic oestrogen) for women to remain "feminine forever". In 1916, leading obstetrician J. Clifton Edgar (1916) commented: "Some have noted that in certain cases, especially of unmarried women, there is a loss of feminine traits and the assumption of certain anatomical male characteristics—a more angular form...or even the development of an imperfect beard or moustache"(p.26). The voice became "harsher" more like a man's. Others noted the breasts became "sunken" and "flabby," the skin "sallow" and "plethoric." "obesity," "stoutness," "deposits of fat" are all common among women. This hyper-medicalisation of menopause aggravated middle-aged women's fears of ageing and loss of femininity much to the advantage of the pharmaceutical industry that flushed out anti-aging products and medical interventions to make them look ever-so-radiant. Ultimately, these products create a false sense of autonomy- a feeling that one can reverse the effects of age- while in reality keeping them intact in the model of a subservient and beautiful mother/wife, leading to another outstanding success of the hetero-patriarchal project.

In 1963--Physician Robert A. Wilson (1963) offered a disparaging depiction of the psychological state of the menopausal woman, "a large percentage of women... acquire a vapid cow-like feeling called a 'negative state.' ... It is a strange endogenous misery.. the world appears as though through a grey veil and they live as docile, harmless creatures, missing most of life's values."(p. 12). Menopause - the end of fertility - is thus referred to as a decline. It was a crisis, a malady that seemed to marr both women's physical and psychological well-being. This medicalisation of menopause has deemed the 'natural' process of it to require treatment. One needs to inquire: what is it that is making the woman unfit here? The hot flashes or the loss of childbearing capacities? Their ageing or their declining usefulness in the heteropatriarchal structure? These questions directly investigate the masculine nature of medicine which is shaped and in turn, shapes the discourse of a feminine body as a site of labour both productive and (re) productive. As menopause indicates a loss in capacity to do both, energies are invested into correcting the malady.

 Menopause media
Popular culture has been seen as the perverse of the youth and hence, traditional media has had very fleeting and distorted depictions of menopause. Two of them, that I could find, are (a) Samantha in Sex and the City 2 (2010), where one of the characters, Samantha does whatever she can to deal with her hot flashes, night sweats, and irritability. In one of the scenes, she goes all-guns-

blazing around conservative men and women, trying to arrange her purse, whose contents — including some pills for menopause — have fallen out on the streets. (b) In the Canadian sitcom Workin' Moms (2017), streaming on Netflix, Catherine Reitman's character — in her 30s only — is diagnosed with peri-menopause, after she is shown to sweat excessively and wake up in a pool of sweat every night. Logothetis (1991) reviewed medical and popular literature from the '60s, '70s, and '80s and analysing the imagery of mid-life women, she found three images of the menopausal woman: "as physically deteriorated, psychologically disabled, and socially worthless" (p. 24). Despite the changes in popular culture and beliefs about women in recent years, midlife remains mired in negative images. However, things are changing. Big faces like Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey are talking about their experiences, opening spaces for conversations around it. Closer home, Namita Thapar the Executive Director of Emcure Pharmaceuticals, talked about her journey with anaemia due to heavy menstrual bleeding in perimenopause, at her show Shark Tank India, sending ripples of informed conversations around the topic. In Bombay Begums (2021), a Netflix show, we see the first ever nuanced, big-screen depiction of menopause. Rani, the protagonist, is a bank CEO, a quintessential girl boss, who deals with her hot flashes in the secrecy of the company washroom and can be seen in denial of her menopause. When asked about her sudden panic attacks in the meetings, she says, "It's not menopause, I still have a lot of time to get there". Her denial reveals the socialisation around ageing, which is seen as more oppressive for women than men, hence menopause becoming an ominous affair.

Taylor spoke of "emotions such as shame only being able to exist as a reflection of some notion of standards shared in a society". Taylor (1988) stated, "To feel shame is to sense that I fail on some standard… (p. 111). Women's stories of embarrassment or shame while having a hot flash in a public place may demonstrate a sense of failing on some standard." One is at once reminded of The Second Sex: "Towards fifty she (a woman) is in full possession of her powers; she feels rich in experience; that is the age at which men attain the highest position, the most important posts; as for her, she is put into retirement" (Beauvoir, 1956). This fear of losing out on opportunities manifests a deliberate silence among women.

Menopause market
Capitalism has caught up like always. The term "menopause market" entails a section of consumer products that cater to the needs of women in the perimenopausal and menopausal phases, hence needing customised care due to the drastic change taking place in the body. The global menopause market was valued at USD 15.53 billion in 2022, growing at a CAGR of 7.10% during the forecast period from 2023 to 2028 to reach USD 23.44 billion by 2028 ("Menopause Market" 2023). Alphabet M in red with a white tick in the middle is the universal symbol for menopause-verified products launched by Gen M, the famous menopause partner for brands. "United by a universal symbol for menopause shopping, GenM has set into motion a vibrant, inclusive, and trusted marketplace that delivers on the needs of an underserved audience, to empower them the choice and control to manage their menopause", reads the Gen M website (Trushwor_Generation_M, 2024).

In fact, many skincare and wellness brands have started R&D to make products that meet the needs of women as they are. Felice (2021) in his research explains how this menopause consciousness has

led to the development of the Femtech industry. Women investors, in particular, are playing a lead role, with venture funding for "femtech" surpassing $1 billion for the first time in 2021. Examples of such brand products are: Grace bracelet which was designed to detect hot flushes and cool down the wearer. Pabel and Menopod are hand-held devices that can be pressed to become cold and then applied to the body. Mobile apps have been designed to self-track experienced changes. For example, based on a fixed list of 'symptoms', Hot Flash Sisters and Menopause View suggest the user chart patterns to show to their doctor. MySysters and My Pause correlate tracked 'symptoms' with data on the user's lifestyle to provide 'symptom management' advice.

Not only minuscule products but a whole line of fashion trends called 'Menocore' has been started to design comfortable clothes for menopausal women: represented by baggy khaki pants, cotton breezy shirts, comfortable slip-ons, and a neutral colour palette. Eva Wiseman (2019), a fashion columnist calls it "Fashion that is an anti-trend". In her column, she writes "This is fashion based on women who the fashion industry does not design for – women forgotten by brands. Rather than spending our long-saved cash on outfits inspired by a 23-year-old heiress to a yoga fortune, it makes far more sense to buy into a trend centred around ladies who have seen it all and decided: swishy cardigan". "It's comfort, fluidity, and ease. It's uncomplicated with a subtle hint of sophistication and a healthy helping of understatement. It allows me to focus on what I'm feeling rather than feeling the clothing on me." writes another fashion website (Start, 2023). First coined by a fashion website called Man Repeller, menocore has given birth to billion-dollar brands like Eileen Fisher (tag line: for good and supporting women) or Becoming (tag line: cool clothing for hot moments). The market, it can be said, is reflecting and extracting from the common growing consciousness of care towards these women. But, it is not all that rosy. With products and brands such as these, it is important to notice that a special image of menopausal women is being curated by the market. A woman in their 50s, professional and unstoppable, who needs neutral colour clothing and a hot flash monitoring silver bracelet to get through the difficult and shameful process of ageing. The menocore trend extends from the patriarchal idea of "wearing suitable clothes at a suitable age". As if their bodies, if not they, have moved past the pointed stilettos and tight dresses that they were once very much encouraged to wear. The Grace bracelet marketing frames hot flashes as 'embarrassing' and offers a 'solution' to reverse their effect ("Grace Cooling" n.d.). As if a display of hormonal imbalance in a woman's body is improper and hence should be controlled.

Finally, no matter how things change in media and the market, the feminist movement has only made intangible changes, with the state's lack of initiative towards menopause being one of its failings. The UK government's appointment of a Menopause Employment Champion, whose duties include focusing on workplace support, raising awareness of menopause-related issues, and advising employers on small but significant changes they could make to the workplace, like offering those experiencing symptoms more regular breaks or a choice of uniform, is the only mention of a state-initiated effort towards menopause (Department for Work and Pensions, 2023). How then does the state see menopausal women? The answer is in silence. It doesn't see them at all.

My menopause is not a hot topic: gynocentric narratives

Feminist response to menopause: 'i feel neither deficient nor diseased.'

It would be only too convenient to imagine that feminism, for all the hue and cry it has created in the 21st century, was quiet while the severely pejorative medical narrative of menopause gained mass appeal in the 20th century. For feminism is a starkly subaltern ideology that seeks to subvert the patriarchal status quo, it did challenge the know-how of the time. The decades since the 1960s saw the emergence of a dramatic feminist response, concerning the characterisation of menopause, the scientific bases for the treatment of menopausal symptoms, and the risks of oestrogen replacement therapy hitherto touted as the 'elixir of youth' for women.

In the 1980s, feminists raised several objections to the medical construction of menopause as a disease and the deployment of deprecatory constructions of femininity. Feminist writers countered the dominant medical narrative on 2 fronts:
They critiqued the ascription of a set of menopausal symptoms noted in Western countries as the definitive parameter to describe the experience of menopause for all menstruators everywhere. This was not the case as symptoms vary across cross-cultural ethnographies. Feminists insist that interpreting menopause based on a singular gender or Eurocentric research overlooks and homogenises non-European experiences. In a study of 200 Egyptian perimenopausal women, Gohar (2005) found that Egyptian women experience far more menopausal symptoms than their Western counterparts. Differently, Sievert and Hernandez (2003) conducted a study in Puebla, Mexico in which women described their menopausal symptoms as a normal time of life to mature as a woman, as an opportunity to save money spent on menstrual pads, and as a phase ordained by God, hence, shedding light on the heterogeneous menopausal experiences of menstruators across the globe.
Secondly, the Feminists critiqued the rampant use of HRT as it robbed women of control of their bodies and impeded the natural process of ageing. In her book, 'Menopause: A Positive Approach', Rosetta Reitz (1977) begins her first chapter on hormone replacement therapy by saying: "I feel neither deficient nor diseased". The promotion of HRT runs on the assumption that oestrogen is what defines femininity and womanhood and its lack in the body must be corrected, which feminists vehemently disagree with. A woman's femininity is not tied to her ovaries, they argue.

A dominant theme of feminist discourse is that menopause is a natural body process, a new phase of life that doesn't limit a woman's capacities. It is but one aspect of the life spectrum and not a disorder, a drastically displacing event. "Replacing the metaphor of decline with a metaphor of change creates a space for personal self-assertion and growth during menopause" (Komesaroff et al., 2013).

In the 21st century, the relationship between the feminist movement and menopause takes place in the ambit of the fourth wave 'Internet Feminism'. The fourth wave of feminism, starting circa 2008, is "defined by technology: tools that are allowing women to build a strong, popular, reactive movement online", through key affordances such as "immediacy, rapidity, dialogue" (Chamberlain, 2016). Thus, with 'Meno Tik Tok' carving a niche in women's health conversations

on the internet, we saw a new dawn in feminism. This trend of 'menopause influencers' apart from giving women a strong sense of female community to share their experiences, now works on the logic of fun and freedom that menopause shall bring.

Research
Over 15 days, we conducted in-depth candid interviews[A] with 20 menopausal and perimenopausal people in 40-60 age groups belonging to different socio-economic backgrounds in Delhi. All the respondents were employed, while 10 women were monthly-wage workers earning less than 2,00,000 per year, the rest were middle and upper-middle-class women. The names of the respondents have been changed to maintain anonymity. The respondents were comfortable in either of two languages- Hindi and English. The interviews lasted about 10-15 minutes in which we recorded information about their personal details, educational and working status, and their experience of menopause. Our research sample was too small for us to generalize any sentiment about a region, a tier 1 city, in this case. However, it will be increasingly clear with our analysis below that space and time have had a direct effect on women's bodies.

Before we examine the lived experience of menopause from our sample interviews, the evaluation of social mores, culture and nature of the society which our interviewees inhabit is important, for a primary reason: As drawing from Bourdieu (1990), we know, that society disciplines the body and therefore also gives cultural vocabulary to express it's embodied experience hence responses of the menstruators has a historical cultural baggage without which the words will fall flat and hollow. Since we are discussing the impact of the spatio-temporal on women and their bodies, we have an obligation to bring Amiry back. The work is written on a backdrop of genocide, a hormonal imbalance in the state, if we may say, reacts with the body politic to enable a troublesome reaction to the psychological and physiological experience of womanhood. The political is highly personal here. The situatedness of Amiry's colleagues in a state which is in flux is embodied by them.

Experience
Speaking about her experience with menopause, Sanyogita Manan, a 52-year-old Paediatrician shared, *"I hit menopause a year ago. Around the age of 50, my periods became irregular and the flow reduced, fluctuating between gaps of 2-3 months. I was irritable and cranky. I faced sleep disturbance and leg cramps. My cholesterol level shot up and I gained weight. However, I did not need to seek medical help."* Talking about the limited awareness about menopause, Vanita, another respondent shared, *"Nobody really talked about menopause. I found out about it from my friends and colleagues only when they were going through it. I could not discuss it with my family."* Of the 20 women we spoke to, most shared the sentiment of acceptance of the biological fact of menopause. They regarded it as a natural bodily transition that had little to no change in their social position and relationship with family. The sheer obviousness of menstruation and menopause made women hesitant to speak about it, they did not deem it a worthy conversation since it was just so... universal. The reluctance of our respondents -half of whom were from low-income earning households- is simply because they have never had the privilege to think about and pay attention to their changing bodily needs.

"*Sabhi auraton ko hota hi hai. Iss par kya baat karna?* " (It naturally happens to every woman, what is there to talk about ?)

Distress and neglect?
Manju, a 52-year-old tailor in Shaheen Bagh, Delhi who attained menopause at 48 shared, *"I faced heavy bleeding for a few months and then it abruptly stopped. I face severe joint pain now. "*When asked if she consulted a doctor regarding the pain, she said, *"Itni si cheez ke liye kyu jayenge doctor ke paas?" (*Why would I consult a doctor just for joint pain ?)

Anuradha, a worker at Goonj Foundation, Delhi shared, *"My periods stopped abruptly at the age of 36. When I sought medical advice, I learned that I was anaemic. The longer the menses last, the better for the body. My eyes have weakened, and I cannot see properly. I wear spectacles."*

A few respondents shared that their menstruation cycles stopped after they underwent hysterectomy. One 58-year-old respondent shared that after she hit menopause at 42, she developed an ovarian cyst and now requires an oophorectomy procedure, only exacerbating the discomfort and pain post-menopause. Most of the post-menopausal women complained of cloudy vision, cataracts, and itching sensations in the eyes.

A Feminist Menopause?
When asked about their experience with menopause, some of our respondents echoed a sentiment of चैन - emancipation and ease on financial, physical, and sexual fronts post-attaining menopause. We are at once reminded of The New York Times article that boldly proclaims in its title "*Women Can Have a Better Menopause. Here's How"*[17]. The article proceeds to lay the feminist underworking of menopause - women can experience a liberating menopausal transition, free of fear, shame or secrecy. Some of our respondents resonated with this idea of a life-affirming menopause.

Financial ease- Understandably, it was the women from the lower economic backgrounds who expressed financial ease now that their monthly flow had ceased. A pack of menstrual pads (6n) costs 50 rupees on average. Depending on the flow, one needs around 2-3 packets in one cycle. Our respondents who earned 7000-10000 rupees a month preferred using reusable cloth pads made from residue cotton clothes, calling it sustainable and pocket-friendly.

Power or freedom?- Many Indian women embrace menopause; it can be socially advantageous in a society with highly exclusionary rules of conduct and rituals surrounding it. Indian culture indoctrinates women into leading a restrained life during menstruation, from adolescence to middle age. In North India, menstruating women are not allowed to go to the temple or touch pickles for fear of polluting the sacred, the holy. They are assigned separate utensils and made to sleep on the floor. Once this restriction is over, it is natural that they feel immensely relieved and free. Some women can advance in the social ladder of authority as elders with the experience of guiding junior members of their families. They look forward to embracing their role as grandmothers, liberated from the stresses of domesticity now that their daughters-in-law have become the anchor of the household.

We see this reflected in our research with Swati Thakur, a 57-year-old tailor sharing, *"Now that my menses have stopped, I can go to temple and attend sangat (religious meetings). Pooja-paath mein mana laga rehta hai"* (I put my heart into religious worship)

When asked about life post-attaining menopause, Niharika Menon, a 50-year-old woman who is a professional soft skill trainer shared, *"I feel free to travel long distances now without the worry of staining my clothes and changing pads. The anxiety and irritation I felt in the peri-menopausal phase have receded. I have centred my energy towards fitness and spirituality."*

Depending on the social context, the cessation of menstruation may either garner increased opportunities and power—and sexuality finally freed from fertility—or be viewed as a non-event, a time when women no longer receive special attention (Charlap, 2019). For instance, menopausal Mayan women in Guatemala, Mexico become a part of their spiritual community by attaining a leadership status (Bre'on, 2011). However, menopause is not always accompanied by social elevation - menopause for married women with no surviving sons in Egypt ends any hope for them to bear males to extend the family line (Morsy, 1978).

At times, post menopause, some women become 'eligible' for roles in the extra-domestic arena that grant them access and social recognition that they were previously denied. In her seminal work, "White Sarees and Sweet Mangoes, Partings and Ties" anthropologist Sarah Lamb (2000) speaks of a woman, Khudi Thakrun from her research at Mangadoi Village in Assam. Thakrun is a Brahmin widow who remained fully engrossed with family and village affairs, even at the ripe old age of ninety-seven. As an influential moneylender, she cultivated relations with everyone in the village and played a pivotal role in initiating marriages among prospective families, much to the disapproval of the elderly males.

Sexual ease- "In the months prior to menopause, noticing my symptoms, I started following menopause coaches on Instagram who spread awareness about this bodily change. I do not feel sad that my periods have ended. I find myself to be more active and consistent." shared Rituja Kashyap, a 55-year-old homemaker. When asked about her relationship with her husband, *"Sex is more fun now., I can have unprotected sex without worrying about pregnancy. My relationship with my husband does not stand on the grounds of bodily changes. My role in my family remains unchanged."*

While this may not be the case for most women, feminist writers are insistent on not casting midlife—when women no longer serve as baby-making machines as the end of social existence but the beginning of a zestful life experience. Liberation from the motherhood mandate and family care often emerges as eureka moments, in which women may finally heave a sigh of relief, find a coveted opportunity for recuperating personal space, reassess professional trajectories and discover new priorities. "*...you will feel like you again, but a better you."*, shared Cari Rosen (2017), Guardian journalist. And one is reminded of the soliloquy delivered by Belinda (Kristen Scott) in the widely renowned show Fleabag, *"Women are born with pain built in. It's our physical destiny – period pains, sore boobs, childbirth. We carry it within ourselves throughout our lives...We have pain on a cycle for years and years and years, and then just when you feel you are making peace with it*

all, what happens? The menopause comes. The fucking menopause comes and it is the most wonderful fucking thing in the world. Yes, your entire pelvic floor crumbles and you get fucking hot and no one cares, but then you're free. No longer a slave, no longer a machine with parts. You're just a person. In business" (Bradbeer, 2019. 11: 58). Belinda dares to say something out loud what we've all been thinking, it takes the monthly rite of passage to finally cease for a woman to be a person again, her worth, no longer tied to her eggs.

Belinda's soliloquy is in the aftermath of her winning the award 'Best Woman in Business' at her workplace. Why should she be cornered into accepting a 'Woman' award?', she asks. She calls it "infantilising" as she'd have rather preferred to be the best in business across all genders, successful across all genders. She wants to be "in business". In today's neoliberal world, the ultimate liberation for an older woman seems to lie in breaking countless glass ceilings and having a successful professional career. This notion of freedom attaches great emancipatory stature to the self-made, financially independent woman. (Belinda is a fictional example of that) However, the inability to accrue such self-made success is then seen as a failure by the ideal, ever-so-congenial, productive worker. This neoliberal view can force older workers to mask the effects of bodily ageing that might hinder their productivity and possibly detriment their security of tenure. Neoliberal capitalism has pervaded right about everything today, a person's bodily transition is no more their own experience, it has either been pounced upon by the market or simply been rejected, shrouded in secrecy in an incredibly high-paced, global work system.

Female-less menopause: limitation

The fight for representation and information dissemination regarding menopause that the feminist movement has won in the sphere of women's health, has not even gained a significant appeal for LGBTQIA+ individuals. The mainstream menopause discourse is exclusionary. When we started to read about this section for the paper, the closest we could get to finding research on menopause in nonbinary or trans people was a resource section of a website called Queermenopause run by Tania Glyde, a London-based psychotherapist. Drawing from the limited research landscape, let's understand what society looks like for a non-AFAB or a trans man in menopause.

"The image we're given of the menopause doesn't include queer people. We're sold the story that it happens to long-haired women with kids and husbands and maybe a busy career, a glitzy gang of girls to hang out with, at the local wine bar or on their conservatory sofa in cosy pretty *pyjamas* if it all gets too much," writes Bunny Cook a 47-year-old gender neutral, homosexual in a personal essay for Hello (2019). Cook here hints at a very absurd problem in the media representation of today's times which is the dearth of queer narratives and characters who are ageing. "It is perhaps unsurprising that there is no cultural template for the non-heterosexual, non-cis menopause. While mainstream media appears superficially to promote Pride, for example, it remains extremely transphobic and causes measurable stress" (Hello, 2019). The media is also ageist in its promotion of consumption-driven unattainable youthfulness. As if we live in a world where queer individuals die after 40. Society then seems not only ignorant of the menopause of queers but also unwilling to extend the privilege of representation to them.

It can be found that even the medical profession is acutely unprepared to accommodate the menopause challenges of queers, how then can the social be free of taboos? B.L. Marshall (2011) points out that studies of sexuality and ageing are generally "underpinned by a biomedical model of heterosexuality, deflecting attention from gender [and] sexual diversity,". Tania Glyde (2021) in her dissertation research finds that several participants felt that non-normative identities and life paths were simply not understood by most therapists. In that case, participants who were both considering transition and entering menopause had to perform for two sets of gatekeepers: GPs (by taking care not to mention gender in case they were denied testosterone), and gender clinics (by taking care not to mention menopause in case they were told they weren't trans enough). This is a complex balancing act to perform while in a state of evolving identity and confusion due to menopause symptoms. This suggests that mainstream counselling and other healthcare training need to build in GSRD (Gender Sexual and Relationship Diversity) and menopause/age awareness systemically, from the very start.

To say that (a) lack of visibility and (b) lack of capacity building in therapists and gynaecologists, are the only two sociological dimensions to menopause in the lives of non-AWAB, is to again commit the crime of limitation. Our literature review cum analysis is completely based on secondary, white, and Western data hence, is grossly under-researched. However, it is essential for a paper on menopause to hold a section, no matter how compact, that talks about experiences from the intersectionality of gender identities because menopause as a biomedical condition has everything to do with ovaries and nothing to do with gender.

Conclusion
As we come to the end of the study, what is made clear is the confluence of media, market, and medicine that has been successful in branding menopause as a crisis- a menace that needs to be controlled and corrected. And, when through the research we attempted to lay out the intricacies of the crisis, the women we interviewed shared something entirely different. As replete in the themes discussed above: we see menopause as a mixed bag. While the ageing that accompanies menopause may discourage their bodily freedom, sociologically, as members of society, women feel at ease. That's when feminists come up to counter the hitherto reigning image of crisis with the image of innovation. Innovation of the self. For them, post-menopause is a time of retreats, spas, and self-discovery, away from the social shackles that their reproductive organs produce. However, this stance is not without error. Two limitations to the narrative are (a) The promised 'innovation' is structurally embedded into the patriarchal-capitalist structure of commodifying bodies. In the narrative of the market, a menopause vacation, menopause courses, and production of content by menopause influencers can bring discovery of the self, and women, like always, are co-opting into the market's control, thus plunging into the same structure they sought to break away from. How then is true liberation possible? (b) This feminism also stands as the culprit of representing a particular social class (upper class) and geographical area (the first world). We attempted to then strike a balance by diversifying our sample - half of our respondents were from lower middle-class backgrounds- and our literature intersectional. The answers that we got from our conversations echo a general sentiment of ease - ease in indulging in religious affairs, ease in managing and exploring the body, and for some, financial ease of not spending on pads and sanitary wear.

A. Following are the three sets of questions we asked our participants (in addition to follow-up questions based on their responses.) -
1. Please share your name, age and occupation.
2. Have you attained menopause? If yes, at what age?
1. Please share your experience with menopause/perimenopause. Did you look forward to it?
2. Did you seek medical help during menopause?
1. Has your relationship with your family and intimate partner changed post-menopause? Do you now see your role evolving in your household?
2. Are there any rituals attached to the attainment of menopause in your community?

References

- Amiry, S. (2010). *Menopausal Palestine: Women at the Edge.*
- Beauvoir, S. d. (1956). *The second sex* (; H. M. Parshley, Trans.). J. Cape.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice.* Stanford University Press.
- Chamberlain, P. (2016). *Affective temporality: towards a fourth wave. Gender and Education,* 28(3), 458–464. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1169249
- Charlap, C., & Dancourt, S. (2022). « La fabrique de la ménopause ». *Pour, N° 242*(1), 171–175. https://doi.org/10.3917/pour.242.0171
-
- Department for Work and Pensions. (2023, March 6). Government appoints first Menopause Employment Champion to improve workplace support. *GOV.UK.* https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-appoints-first-menopause-employment-champion-to-improve-workplace-support
- Diers, D. W. a. a. C. J. (1970). THE AGE OF MENOPAUSE IN CLASSICAL GREECE AND ROME. *Human Biology*, *42*(1), 79–86. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41449006
- Edgar, J. C. (1916). *The practice of obstetrics: Designed for the Use of Students and Practitioners of Medicine.*
- Felice, M. C., Søndergaard, M. L. J., & Balaam, M. (2021). *Resisting the Medicalisation of Menopause: Reclaiming the Body through Design.* https://doi.org/10.1145/3411764.3445153
- Glyde, T. (2021). *How can therapists and other healthcare practitioners best support and validate their queer menopausal clients? Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 38(4), 510–532. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2021.1881770
- Gohar, I. E. M. (2005). *Design, Implementation and Evaluation of a Reproductive Health Informational Guide for Postmenopausal Women*. MD thesis, Alexandria University, Faculty of Nursing.
- *Grace Cooling | Hot flush relief*. (n.d.). Grace Cooling. https://www.gracecooling.com/
- Gunter, J. (2021, May 25). *Opinion | How Women Can Have a Feminist Menopause*. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/25/opinion/feminist-menopause.html
- Hello. (2019, February 13). The menopause and me – when you're gender neutral. HELLO! https://www.hellomagazine.com/healthandbeauty/health-and-fitness/2019021368726/gender-neutral-and-the-menopause/
- Kelly, Bre'on (2011). *Menopause as a Social and Cultural Construction* XULAneXUS: Vol. 8: Iss. 2, Article 4.
- Komesaroff, P., Rothfield, P., & Daly, J. (Eds.). (1997). *Reinterpreting Menopause: Cultural and Philosophical Issues* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203379516
- Lamb, S. (2000). *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes: Aging, Gender, and Body in North India.* University of California Press.
- Logothetis, M. L., Levine-Silverman, S., Jacobson, S. F., & Smith, E. D. (1991). *Women's Decisions about Estrogen Replacement Therapy. Western Journal of Nursing Research,* 13(4), 458–474. https://doi.org/10.1177/019394599101300403

- Louis, D. G. C. P., De Gardanne, C., De Gardanne, C., Louis, D. G. C. P., De Gardanne, C. P. L., De Gardanne, C., De Gardanne, C., De Gardanne, C., De Gardanne, C. P. L., & De Gardanne, C. P. L. (n.d.). *De la menopause: ou de L'Age critique des femmes (1821)*. https://www.abebooks.com/book-search/title/menopause-lage-critique-femmes/author/gardanne-charles-pierre-louis/?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- Marshall, B. L. (2011). *The Graying of "Sexual Health":* A Critical Research Agenda. Canadian Review of Sociology, 48(4), 390–413. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1755-618x.2011.01270.x
- *Menopause Market Size and Share Analysis*. (n.d.). https://www.delveinsight.com/report-store/menopause-market
- Morsy, S. A. (1978). *30 Sex differences and folk illness in an Egyptian village*. In *Harvard University Press eBooks* (pp. 599–616). https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674733091.c34
- Reitz, R. (1977). *Menopause: a positive approach*. https://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA04355533
- Rosen, C. (2017, November 21). *Am I menopausal? You asked Google – here's the answer*. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/dec/14/am-i-menopausal-google-autocomplete-question
- Sievert, L. L. & Hernandez, E. G. (2003). *Attitudes Toward Menopause in Relation to Symptom Experience in Puebla Mexico*. Women's Health, 38, 93-106
- Start, A. (2023, February 17). *MENOCORE IS THE NEW NORMCORE… AND I'M IN! — Simply Start Living*. Simply Start Living. https://www.simplystartliving.com/simply-start-living-blog/menocore-is-the-new-normcore
- The History of Menopause – Tabu Group. (2021, November 15). Tabu Group.
- https://www.heytabu.com/blogs/mentionables/the-history-of-menopause
- Thomas, L., & Taylor, G. (1988). *Pride, Shame and Guilt: Emotions of Self-Assessment. The Philosophical Review*, 97(4), 585. https://doi.org/10.2307/2185420
- Trushwor_Generation_M. (2024, December 18). *GenM | the menopause partner for brands*. GenM. https://gen-m.com/
- U.S. Congress, O. O. T. A., GIBBONS, J. H., Herdman, R. C., Gough, M., Hanna, K. E., Rubin, S., Sargent, M. C., Giardini, A., & Mazade, L. (1992). *The Menopause, Hormone Therapy, and Women's Health*. U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Wiseman, E. (2019, May 19). *It's time to talk about the menopause… and freedom at last |Eva Wiseman*. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/may/19/its-time-to-talk-menopause-and-freedom-at-last-eva-wiseman
- World Health Organization: WHO. (2024, October 16). *Menopause*. https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/menopause

Role of Open Communication among Parent-Child in Mitigating Parentification and Internalizing Behavior among Adolescents: A Comprehensive Review

Arjun Srivastava, Department of Psychology, Sharda University[1]

Introduction

Within the sphere of family dynamics, a disturbing and pervasive phenomenon unfolds within the parent-adolescent relationship, exerting a profound impact that erodes the bond between them and poses severe challenges to the growth and well-being of adolescents – known as parentification. Parentification occurs when adolescents are tasked with familial responsibilities and obligations that surpass their developmental capabilities, neglecting their needs and wants. This leads to adverse outcomes, including internalizing behaviors, academic challenges, and attachment issues in adolescents subjected to such demands.

In the context of Indian society, where the essence of collectivistic values prioritizes family over individual needs, the belief is that " there exists a powerful belief that "*aapko khudse pehle pariwaar ko rakhna padta hai*" (family must come before oneself). Parental expectations often resonate with the idea that " *aulaad hi toh badi hokar maa-baap ka sahara banti hai*" (Children are the ones who grow up to become the support for their parents), and "*agar baccho se kaam nahi karayege toh who zimmedar kaise banege*" (if children are not given work, how will they become responsible?). These cultural narratives pose significant challenges in addressing parentification, as they are deeply ingrained in societal norms and expectations.

Consider the situation of 17-year-old Trijya, whose parents are heavily involved in their work commitments. As the eldest daughter, she takes on the essential and demanding role of handling household chores and looking after her younger brother. From a collectivistic viewpoint, these family obligations can significantly enhance the development of empathy through caregiving while also nurturing maturity and an unwavering sense of responsibility.

In such scenarios, it is common for parents to depend on their children for support, particularly the eldest, which strengthens familial bonds. However, these responsibilities carry a steep price. With her board exams approaching, Trijya's need to juggle household duties during the day leaves her with no choice but to burn the midnight oil, and her early morning routine—driven by her mother's high expectations—further robs her of precious sleep. Consequently, while these responsibilities may facilitate personal development, they also thrust upon her a significant burden, highlighting the complex and dichotomous nature of parentification. Thus, this phenomenon requires a detailed examination, particularly in Indian society, where familial dynamics and roles are intricately linked to cultural expectations.

Thus, this study seeks to offer valuable insights into the phenomenon of parentification by

---

1 Arjun Srivastava, a third-year Psychology student at Sharda University, focuses on effective communication and mental well-being. He engages in mentorship and community initiatives to apply psychological insights to real-world challenges. Through research and outreach, he aims to drive meaningful change in education and mental health.

conducting a comprehensive review of the existing literature, focusing on the factors that influence whether the outcomes of parentification will be beneficial or harmful for adolescents. Existing literature highlights that effective and constructive communication within the family system is pivotal in alleviating the detrimental effects of parentification, emphasizing the significance of resilient parent-adolescent relationships in promoting adolescents' emotional and psychological well-being. Hence, Through an in-depth analysis of the role of communication and family dynamics, this study offers valuable insights for educators, parents, and practitioners seeking to address the complexities associated with parentification.

The following sections will discuss the multifaceted nature of parentification, delving into its various manifestations. Furthermore, the paper will examine the correlation between parentification and adolescent internalizing behaviors. Lastly, it will present a theoretical framework illustrating how open communication within families can act as a protective mechanism against the negative consequences of parentification, thereby supporting adolescents' emotional and psychological well-being.

Parentification
Parentification, a phenomenon wherein children assume parental roles and obligations that surpass their developmental capacity, profoundly influences adolescent well-being. In essence, parentification robs a child of their precious childhood, forcing them to shoulder adult responsibilities far too soon. As these children adopt parental functions, their fundamental needs are often neglected, leading to poignant social isolation and a significant deficiency of support, as those who should provide guidance and support instead become dependent on the child. This occurrence frequently emerges within familial structures where situational exigencies necessitate children to undertake adult-like responsibilities, including caregiving, emotional support, and decision-making (Hooper, Doehler, Jankowski, & Tomek, 2012).

As illustrated by the case of Trijya, experiences of parentification may yield both beneficial (making adolescents responsible, mature, and more) and harmful outcomes (with adolescents potentially feeling overwhelmed or having unmet needs). Empirical research elucidates this bifurcated nature of parentification, with several studies highlighting its potential to yield positive developmental results. For instance, Jurkovic and Casey (2000) discovered that Latino adolescents who underwent emotional parentification demonstrated elevated levels of interpersonal competence, indicating that under specific conditions, parentification can facilitate adaptive development. Additionally, newer studies have pointed out how parentification enhances emotional maturity and personal growth. A recent investigation by Shamsaee et al. (2024) on the psychological effects of parentification in females, where they interviewed 21 female participants and found that parentified youth may develop emotional maturity and resilience as they assume adult responsibilities (Shamsaee et al., 2024).

Conversely, parentification is also associated with enduring adverse consequences, such as attachment issues, psychological distress, and compromised relational competencies, with some repercussions persisting across generations (Nuttall, Zhang, Valentino, & Borkowski, 2019; Brown, 2007). Furthermore, Shamsaee et al. (2024), alongside maturity, found an emotional

burden among females subjected to parentification, characterized by stress, anxiety, and feelings of isolation (Shamsaee et al., 2024). These divergent outcomes indicate that parentification cannot be easily categorized as "beneficial" or "harmful." Instead, its effects are influenced by many factors, including the specific nature of parentification, familial communication dynamics, and the broader cultural context (Masiran, Ibrahim, Awang, & Lim, 2023). Therefore, it is essential to evaluate its various types to attain a more nuanced understanding of this dual-faceted concept.

Types of Parentification:
The initial understanding of parentification was about a child taking up the responsibility for the instrumental roles (like bread-winning, cooking, housecleaning, taking care of siblings, etc) of a parental figure. For example, Minuchin (1969) defined parentification as a process in which a child starts fulfilling instrumental roles in a family because of total abandonment of the family by parental figure(s) either physically or psychologically. Later, Jurkovic (1997) classified parentification into two categories based on the role played by the child in the family: *instrumental parentification and emotional parentification.*

Instrumental Parentification
In this form of parentification, the child is expected to play an instrumental role in the family; it includes tasks like breadwinning, caretaking of siblings or parent(s), housecleaning, shopping, and more. It is common in families where one or both parents are impaired to play those roles because of any illness or remain absent from the house because of work.

Emotional Parentification
This generally happens in times of psychological distress in families where a child is expected to provide emotional or psychological support for parent(s). This is usually seen in families where one parent or both suffer from a disease or mental illness, resulting in an unwavering need for psychological or emotional support from the child.

Furthermore, Jurkovic made another classification in which he separated *adaptive parentification* from *pathological parentification* based on severeness and consequences of each.

Adaptive Parentification
This happens when the adolescent must fulfill parental roles or duties for a limited time. Recognizing and appreciating the child's efforts are crucial, yielding positive adolescent outcomes. Adaptive parentification enhances interpersonal competence, making adolescents mature and responsible (Masiran, Ibrahim, Awang, & Lim, 2023)

Pathological Parentification
It is often the destructive form of parentification that is associated with adverse outcomes for adolescents, such as mental distress, academic failure, and psychological disorders, including drug use, aggression, internalizing behaviors, etc. Pathological parentification occurs when the responsibilities are prolonged, leading to an emotional burden, and the efforts or benefits provided by the child to the family go unnoticed or are insufficiently appreciated.

From this classification, we can conclude that parentification has positive and negative adolescent outcomes. The positive outcomes arise when parentification (instrumental or emotional) is adaptive. Conversely, suppose the parental roles (either instrumental or emotional) are expected to be fulfilled by adolescents over an extended period, and the adolescents' efforts are not recognized or appreciated. In that case, the adverse outcomes of parentification are likely to occur. One such outcome is internalizing behavior.

Parentification and Internalizing Behavior

Although parentification may yield some potentially positive outcomes for an adolescent's development, such as increased responsibility and interpersonal competence, one cannot ignore the negative consequences (self-harm, substance abuse, attachment issues, mental illness, psychological distress, and diminished relationship skills) associated with parentification (Macfie, McElwain, Houts, & Cox, 2005). Therefore, in line with the aim of the current study, which is to investigate the issue of parentification and its influence on internalizing behaviors in adolescents, this section will discuss internalizing behaviors and their connection to parentification.

Internalizing behaviors reflect a child's psychological or emotional health. It is a mental condition where an adolescent, instead of expressing emotions outwardly, may suppress them or direct them inward. Research findings suggest that an adolescent exhibiting internalizing behavior is susceptible to deleterious consequences like depressive disorder, anxiety disorder, somatic complaints, and teenage suicide (Liu, Chen, & Lewis et al., 2011).

A multitude of factors may precipitate internalizing behaviors in an adolescent: addiction to social media, experiences of grief, economic hardship, parental separation, familial discord, domestic violence, and other stressors. Nonetheless, as suggested by Tully, Iacono, & McGue (2008), family dynamics—particularly the role of parentification—emerge as the most significant factor among these, profoundly impacting adolescents' psychological wellbeing and potentially exacerbating internalizing behaviors (Tully, Iacono, & McGue, 2008).

Scholars investigating the interplay between parentification and internalization have suggested that parentification not only influences but may also instigate internalizing behaviors in adolescents. For instance: (Van Loon, Van de Ven, Van Doesum, Hosman, & Witteman, 2017) conducted a cross-sectional and longitudinal study on 118 adolescents with a mentally ill parent. The findings suggested that these adolescents who assumed parental roles experienced mental distress, and within a year, they developed internalizing behaviors. Furthermore, a diverse array of mental health challenges, including depressive symptoms and anxiety, has been correlated with parentification, particularly in the context of emotional parentification (Dariotis, et al., 2023).

Given the rising rates of mental health issues among adolescents worldwide (Wiederhold, 2022), it is of paramount importance to investigate the underlying causes of these issues to alleviate them for the benefit of children's well-being. Therefore, this paper further delves into the nexus between parentification and internalizing behaviors, highlighting the effects of parentification on internalizing issues during adolescence.

Effect of Parentification on Internalizing Behaviour in Adolescence

When a child must assume familial responsibilities, their needs often go unmet. In the absence of social support, the child's emotions remain unexpressed, leading to severe psychopathological disorders such as internalizing behaviors. This further heightens the risk of various other issues, including externalizing behaviors (such as risky sexual behavior or teenage suicide), substance abuse, academic failure, and more.

Parentification and Mental Health Issues**.** Situations like parental neglect, divorce, substance abuse, or mental illness can force a child to adopt parental roles beyond their developmental capacities. When a child internalizes these roles, they may experience pseudo-maturity, resulting in an exaggerated sense of responsibility. The child feels accountable for familial tasks or duties, such as managing finances and resources, caring for siblings, administering parental medication during illness, and completing household chores. Any mistake or shortcoming in fulfilling these responsibilities is perceived as a failure, leading to feelings of guilt, diminished self-esteem, and sadness, which contribute to further mental health issues, including depression (Hooper, Doehler, Jankowski, & Tomek, 2012)

Blurred boundaries and Identity**.** Boundaries delineate roles for each family member and promote healthy family functioning by fostering closeness and intimacy while safeguarding each member's individuality (Kerig & Swanson, 2010). In the context of parentification, the diffusion of boundaries within a family system makes it difficult for caregivers to perceive a child's needs and to acknowledge his psychological distinctiveness. This results in role confusion (i.e., who is the parent and who is the child?), undermining the adolescent's idea of self (self-identity) by imposing inappropriate expectations upon them.

Attachment issues and Emotional Regulation**.** When adolescents indulge in parental roles, their own needs often remain unfulfilled due to a lack of support, nurturance, and the unavailability of a caregiver. As described by (Bowlby, 1977), parentification can lead to a compulsive caregiving pattern, marked by excessive caregiving behavior, difficulty setting boundaries, fear of abandonment, self-sacrifice, and neglect of personal needs. This disruption of attachment results in the suppression of emotions and individual needs by internalizing emotional distress, making it challenging for adolescents to manage emotions effectively.

Interpersonal Incompetence. Adolescents who undergo parentification may struggle to establish secure attachment, leading to an anxious/preoccupied attachment (excessive reassurance) or avoidant attachment style, characterized by emotional detachment to prevent further hurt. The negative impact of parentification on an adolescent's secure attachment with caregivers affects their ability to trust others and to form or maintain interpersonal relationships outside the family, resulting in a generalized distrust stemming from inconsistent support or care from caregivers.

Communication among Parents-adolescents

Thus far, the study has illuminated the multi-faceted nature of parentification by thoroughly addressing its adverse and beneficial outcomes for adolescents. Moreover, it has highlighted the potential link between parentification and internalizing behaviors during adolescence. As previously noted, given the detrimental effects of these issues, it is essential to address them and identify potential solutions to enhance the well-being and foster the development of adolescents.

According to (Barnes & Olson, 1985), good quality parent-adolescent communication increases overall family satisfaction by enhancing cohesion and adaptability among family members. They classified family communication into two patterns: *problematic communication* and *open communication.*

Problematic communication
Problematic communication between parent and adolescent is characterized by a lack of freedom in expressing information, ideas, views, or feelings. It occurs when parents neglect the child's needs, and boundaries between them are either not defined or not respected. This pattern of communication results in unexpressed emotions and conflicts in the parent-adolescent bond, potentially causing adolescent internalizing behavior (Ioffe, Pittman, Kochanova, & Pabis, 2020). Example

Mother: I have an important meeting to attend, so I was hoping you could prepare the meals and look after your younger sibling so he does not disturb me.
Daughter: But Mother, I am tired. I have just returned from school and must complete my homework before heading to my tuition classes.
Mother: Do not try to give me excuses. You are old enough to handle such responsibilities. Just go and do as I have said.

Open communication
Open communication is a pattern of communication that promotes and safeguards the free expression of emotions, feelings, ideas, and information between parents and adolescents. This communication style fosters the parent-adolescent bond by bolstering trust and openness. Additionally, open communication between parent and child decreases the likelihood of the occurrence of mental health symptoms like depression and anxiety. It contributes to adolescents' self-concept development (Van Dijk, et al., 2014).

Example
Mother: This would be a lot to ask, but I need your help. I have a crucial meeting to attend. Can you please prepare the meal and watch your sibling?
Daughter: Mother, I am exhausted, but I understand you need my help so I can look after my sibling. However, I need to complete my homework before my tuition classes. Can we order food instead?
Mother: Good idea. Ordering food will give you time to complete your homework. You may order as per your choice. Just make sure your sibling does not interrupt my meeting. Thank you for understanding and being helpful.

As suggested, open communication correlates inversely with various mental health issues in adolescents, promoting trust and openness among parents and adolescents, subsequently enhancing overall satisfaction among family members. Consequently, open parent-adolescent communication is a mitigating factor against the adverse effects of Parentification and Internalizing behavior in adolescence. Past research in this context underscores robust evidence that healthy and positive parent-adolescent communication correlates with various positive outcomes for the child and can serve as an effective intervention for addressing parentification and internalizing behaviors.

For example, (Wuensch, Kirbach, Meyerding, Bengel, & Pietsch, 2022), an analysis of psychosocial intervention for children of parents with cancer showed that improved parentadolescent communication as an intervention yielded positive changes in depressive and stress-related symptoms, reduced psychological distress and promoted overall life quality of children. Another systematic review of the psychosocial needs of children facing a parent's cancer diagnosis suggested three factors as critical factors to consider in future intervention development, one of which centered on supportive communication with parents and family members (Ellis, Wakefield, Antill, Burns, & Patterson, 2017).

Thus, further, this paper endeavors to underscore the importance of open communication by emphasizing its impact on parentification and internalizing issues in adolescents.

Role of open communication in parentification

Parentification, where a child must fulfill parental roles beyond their developmental capabilities, poses complex challenges. While parentification correlates directly with adverse outcomes for adolescents, it is crucial to discern whether situations such as a mother expecting her daughter to care for her younger sibling or a teenage boy shouldering responsibilities due to a mentally ill father and managing household duties while the mother works contribute an inappropriate burden.

Despite both scenarios exemplifying parentification, they may not necessarily be deemed wrong. Instead of hastily condemning these situations, it is essential to establish strategies to protect adolescents from the adverse effects of parentification, including instances where parents assign household tasks to cultivate maturity and accountability.

Adaptive parentification is crucial in addressing these complexities; when the child's efforts are recognized and appreciated, the experience of parentification becomes a learning process, transforming the assumption of parental roles into a developmental opportunity for adolescents rather than a burden. Therefore, this discourse highlights the significant role of communication patterns within parent-adolescent relationships, emphasizing how open communication can mitigate the harmful consequences associated with parentification.

Defining Roles. When adolescents are tasked with responsibilities typically reserved for parents, they are likely to feel burdened, leading to associated adverse effects. Therefore, parents and adolescents should distribute tasks and responsibilities fairly through open communication. Parents can receive necessary support by openly articulating their expectations and needs while ensuring that adolescents are not burdensome by excessive duties (Sachs et al., 2008).

Moreover, when parents seek to cultivate maturity and accountability in adolescents by delegating tasks to them, maintaining healthy communication becomes essential. This ensures that assigned responsibilities contribute positively to the growth of adolescents rather than becoming a burden or fostering resentment toward parents.

Establishing boundaries. Enmeshed or blurred boundaries between parents and adolescents place undue responsibilities that surpass their developmental capabilities. Although these interactions are frequently viewed as normal developmental processes, research indicates that inadequate

boundaries between parents and adolescents present significant risks to adolescents' well-being (Vanwoerden et al., 2017). Consequently, parents must acknowledge adolescents' developmental limitations in these circumstances to safeguard their well-being.

Open communication is instrumental in this context, enabling adolescents to express their needs and limitations to their parents. Concurrently, parents gain valuable insights into parentification's emotional and psychological effects on their children (Sachs et al., 2008). These insights may help parents adjust their expectations and assign roles that align with their child's well-being and developmental requirements.

Recognition and Appreciation. When an adolescent takes on responsibilities and sacrifices while fulfilling parental roles and yet remains unnoticed and unappreciated, several adverse outcomes are likely to occur, including feelings of resentment toward caregivers, psychological distress, and diminished self-esteem (Arshad & Ambreen, 2024). In such circumstances, open communication is vital to safeguard adolescents' well-being. Through open communication, adolescents are empowered to express their challenges and emotions to their parents, while parents can provide adolescents with support and validation for their experiences.

Consistent appreciation and validation are crucial in bolstering the adolescent's confidence in their abilities and enhancing their self-esteem (Gaur & Gupta, 2024). Consequently, parents should openly acknowledge and appreciate the efforts and sacrifices made in assuming parental roles. Doing so can make adolescents feel valued and understood, strengthen the parent-adolescent bond, foster trust and understanding among family members, and create supportive family dynamics.

Role of open communication in internalizing issues

Internalizing issues in adolescents reflect their emotional and psychological state, often stemming from suppressed emotions or unmet needs. In situations where the undue burden of excessive parental duties hampers the adolescent's mental and emotional health, resulting in internalizing issues like depression, anxiety, and somatic complaints, open communication plays a crucial role in helping adolescents to express emotions and needs while enabling parents to listen with empathy, validate their internalizing experiences and provide essential support (Simpson et al., 2023).

Consider an example of Trijya, a 16-year-old girl who is grappling with grief following the passing of her grandmother a year ago. This profound sense of loss, coupled with what she perceives as a lack of understanding and emotional support from friends and family, has led her to internalize her grief, significantly impeding her daily functioning. As a result, Trijya's academic performance has notably declined; she struggles with sleep disturbances, including difficulty falling asleep and frequent nightmares, which cause her to wake up late in the morning and experience persistent irritability and frequent burnout. Her parents misunderstand her behavior, interpreting it as disrespect. Consequently, their response involves scolding and shouting at her, inadvertently exacerbating her mental and emotional turmoil.

In light of this situation, the paper aims to highlight the significance of open communication, elucidating how fostering an environment of open communication can aid Trijya in addressing her internalization of grief.

Emotional support. Free and open expression of feelings and emotions may assist Trijya in obtaining the emotional support she needs. By sharing her grief with her parents, she can effectively inform them of the inner turmoil and tribulations she endures. In return, parents should patiently listen to her with empathy, validating her experiences to make her feel understood. Showing affection, care, verbal encouragement, and physical embraces from her parents may bolster her emotionally and reassure her that she is not alone in her grief (Yang & Zeng, 2023).

Reduced Internalization of Grief. The ongoing emotional support from her parents will lessen the internalization of grief because when her parents offer her the support and understanding she requires, her perception of inadequate support will be alleviated. This will foster a sense of security in Trijya, enabling her to express her emotions without fear of judgment or rejection. Consequently, the need to hide or suppress emotions will be reduced, as she will feel validated and understood in her grieving process (Simpson et al., 2023).

Addressing Misunderstanding. Trijya's parents misinterpret her behavior as insolence due to a lack of awareness about her psychological distress. Through open communication, Trijya can articulate her emotions and challenges more clearly. By clarifying how her profound longing for her grandmother impedes her daily life — for instance, her sleep quality or her ability to focus on academic tasks —Trijya can help her parents recognize that her behavior is not an intentional defiance but rather a manifestation of her grief. This enhanced understanding facilitated by open communication would yield positive outcomes for Trijya, including supportive responses rather than reactive ones from her parents, validation for her struggles, and the necessary support and encouragement to improve her disrupted daily functioning (Benson et al., 2023).

Strengthening parent-child bond. Open communication will reduce conflicts by addressing misunderstandings. It will foster trust and mutual understanding by enabling Trijya to openly express and share her emotions while allowing her parents to provide support and encouragement. This will cultivate a sense of security and belonging within her, thereby deepening her bond with her parents. Furthermore, enhanced trust and openness in their relationship will help parents identify any negative coping Trijya might be using in dealing with her pain, like substance use, pornography, self-harm, or denial. This awareness in parents would promote help-seeking behavior, breaking down the stigma surrounding mental health issues, and timely intervention of mental health professionals if necessary (McKenna et al., 2021).

Open communication can effectively address internalizing issues, provide necessary support, safeguard the parent-adolescent bond, and foster a positive family environment conducive to the adolescent's overall well-being.

Open Communication as a mitigating factor
Figure 1
Illustrating the mitigating role of open communication

Source: Author
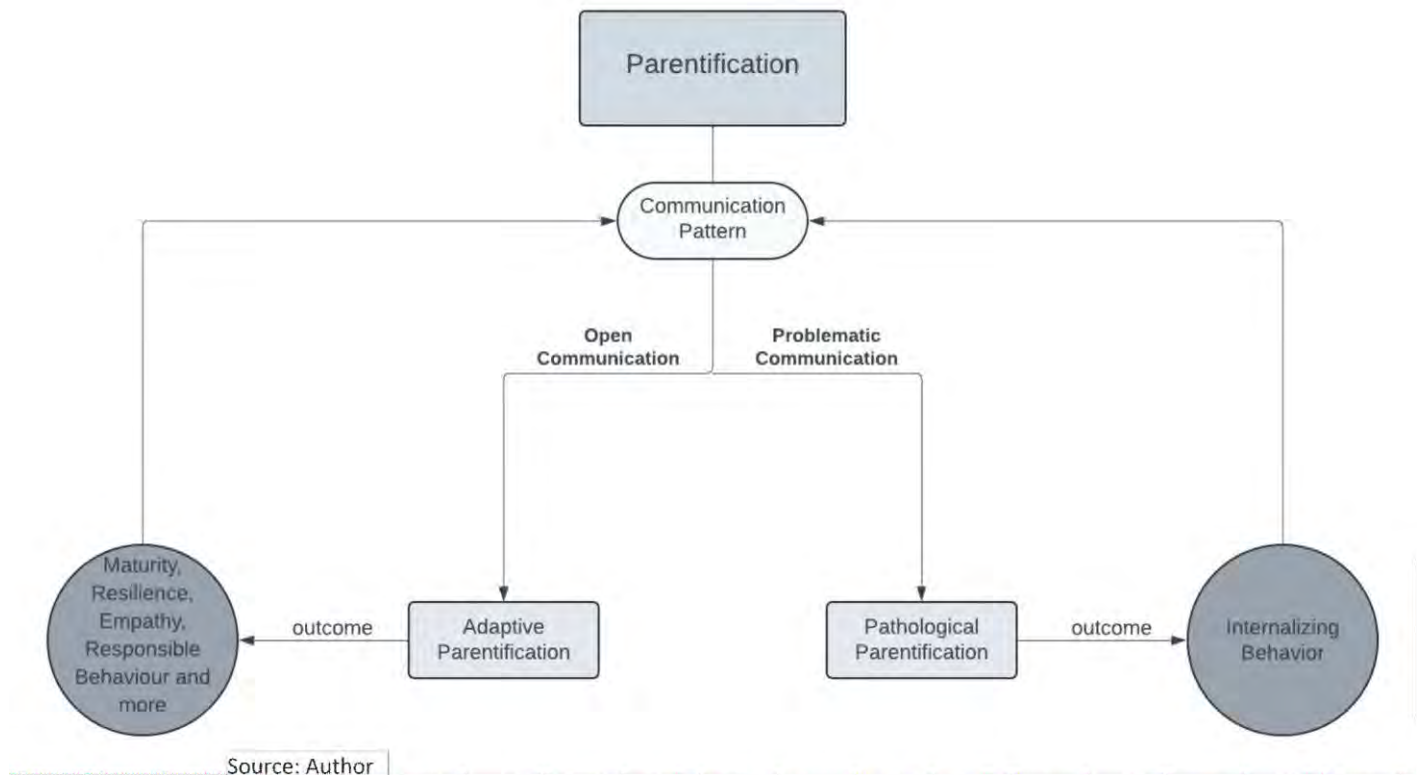
As illustrated (Figure 1), in circumstances when parentification must occur, either when parents delegate their responsibilities to adolescents to make them responsible or when an adolescent must fulfill parental role due to the physical or psychological absence of a parent, the outcome of parentification depends on whether parentification is Adaptive or Pathological in nature, which is determined majorly by the communication pattern used by the adults.

When parents recognize adolescents' efforts, provide encouragement and appreciation, engage in positive dialogue to gain insights regarding the impact of parentification, and adjust their expectations and delegation of tasks in alignment with adolescents' developmental capabilities, the experience of parentification becomes Adaptive. As discussed earlier, this approach makes adolescents responsible and mature, significantly bolstering their self-esteem while safeguarding them from the adverse outcomes of parentification. Conversely, problematic communication patterns are associated with pathological parentification, wherein the adolescent's needs are neglected, and they are expected to perform tasks beyond their developmental capabilities. This results in a burdensome experience that causes psychological distress and disruption in their daily life pursuits, ultimately damaging the mental, physical, and psychological well-being of adolescents.

Moreover, problematic communication restricts adolescents from freely expressing their ideas, emotions, and feelings to their parents. This lack of freedom to share often leads adolescents to suppress their feelings and challenges stemming from pathological parentification, resulting in internalizing behaviors such as depression or anxiety. Suppose adolescents can openly express their emotions and grievances to their parents and are understood and validated. In that case, they will feel supported in their mental health struggles, and the parentification will become adaptive. However, suppose adolescents are neglected or misunderstood, and parentification continues with the same problematic communication. In that case, their mental health issues can further worsen, leading to further adverse outcomes such as substance abuse, self-harm, and more.

Conclusion
By comprehensively reviewing the literature on the subject, this study addresses one of the most debated questions in developmental psychology: should parents engage in parentification? If the answer is no, does a father's delegation of familial responsibilities to his 17-year-old son to foster maturity and responsibility impose an inappropriate burden? Or is it unreasonable for parents to expect their 15-year-old daughter to undertake domestic tasks and assume the caregiving role for her younger sibling because the mother is sick and the father must go out for work? Conversely, if the answer is yes, parentification is acceptable.

What about all its adverse effects?
The point here is that "Should parents engage in parentification?" somewhat obscures the underlying dynamics. Therefore, rather than asking whether parentification should occur, a more pertinent question is: How should it happen? How can parents navigate the process of parentification to ensure that the experience is as adaptive as possible for the adolescent?

The answer lies in open communication. Regardless of the reasons for engaging in parentification, they must talk to their adolescents to understand the impact these responsibilities have on their growth and well-being. Whether adolescents need to take on tasks because their parents are unwell or unavailable or parents assign tasks to cultivate maturity and responsibility, parents need to provide adolescents the opportunity to express their feelings. They should validate their emotions and appreciate and acknowledge their sacrifices and efforts. Parents must ensure that adolescents do not feel isolated in such circumstances, even if they must shoulder responsibilities that overwhelm them mentally, emotionally, and physically.

This approach allows parents to understand their adolescents and provide the necessary emotional support, thus making the experience of parentification adaptive for them. Also, when adolescents receive the support and understanding they need from their parents, they will not feel compelled to suppress their emotions, effectively mitigating the associated internalizing issues.

Limitations
The study has given valuable insights into parentification, associated internalizing issues, and crucial information on how open communication can mitigate both problems. However, a few limitations must be acknowledged.

The current study relies on secondary sources rather than primary data, which means it lacks empirical support for the arguments, and interpretation bias can be introduced. Secondly, the literature reviewed in this study is predominantly Western, which does not account for the nuances of parentification, internalizing issues, and communication practices in non-Western contexts. For instance, in India, social norms and expectations regarding family roles, responsibilities, communication practices, and family dynamics differ significantly from those in Western countries. These cultural differences may influence the generalizability of the findings.

Future research can incorporate primary empirical data from the Indian population to comprehensively understand parentification, associated internalizing issues, and communication practices while addressing social norms and cultural differences.

Additionally, longitudinal studies should be conducted to gain deeper insights into the role of open communication between parent-adolescent in mitigating the parentification and internalizing issues. This approach would provide empirical support while addressing the cultural variations, thereby enhancing the practical applicability of the findings in the Indian context.

Practical Implications
The findings in the study suggest vital practical implications for parents, educators, and policymakers. Parents must understand that the problem is not expecting their adolescents to fulfill responsibilities but how they communicate their expectations. Parents must prioritize healthy communication and active listening, ensuring adolescents feel comfortable sharing their emotions. Parents should provide them with emotional support, encouragement, and gestures of love and care to make them feel validated and understood. Educators must educate adolescents about stress management, emotional regulation, and adaptive coping mechanisms. This education will equip adolescents with the knowledge and skills to navigate life challenges effectively, safeguarding their well-being and ensuring their growth, especially during times of hardships when they feel left alone. Policymakers should introduce educational programs to raise awareness about parentification and its associated internalizing issues. These programs should educate parents on the importance of healthy communication, helping families create a supportive environment fostering adolescents' well-being.

References

- Barnes, H. L., & Olson, D. H. (1985). Parent-adolescent communication and the Circumplex Model. *Child Development, 56(2)*, 438-447.
- Benson A, Rawdon C, Tuohy E, et al. Relationship between parent–adolescent communication and parent involvement in adolescent Type 1 diabetes management, parent/family wellbeing and glycaemic control. Chronic Illness. 2023;0(0). doi:10.1177/17423953231184423
- Boszormenyi-Nagy, I. S. (1973). *Invisible loyalties: Reciprocity in intergenerational family therapy*. American Psychological Association.
- Bowlby, J. (1977). The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds: I. Aetiology and Psychopathology in the Light of Attachment Theory. *British Journal of Psychiatry, 130(3)*, 201–210.
- Brown, R. J. (2007). Introduction to the special issue on medically unexplained symptoms: Background and future directions. *Clinical Psychology Review, 27(7)*, 769-780.
- Chase, N., Deming, M., & Wells, M. (1998). Parentification, parental alcoholism, and academic status among young adults. *American Journal of Family Therapy, 26(2)*, 105–114.
- Dariotis, J. K., Chen, F. R., Park, Y. R., Nowak, M. K., French, K. M., & Codamon, A. M. (2023). Parentification Vulnerability, Reactivity, Resilience, and Thriving: A Mixed Methods Systematic Literature Review. *International journal of environmental research and public health, 20(13), 6197*.
- Deepika, Gaur., Sandhya, Gupta. (2024). 5. The impact of parental support on adolescents' emotional intelligence and self-esteem: A comprehensive literature review.
- International journal of psychological research, doi: 10.33545/26648903.2024.v6.i1b.51
- Ellis, S. J., Wakefield, C. E., Antill, G., Burns, M., & Patterson, P. (2017). Supporting children facing a parent's cancer diagnosis: a systematic review of children's psychosocial needs and existing interventions. *European journal of cancer care, 26(1), 10.1111/ecc.12432*.
- Eva Tedgård, M. R. (2018). An upbringing with substance-abusing parents: Experiences of parentification and dysfunctional communication. *Sage Journals*.
- Fitzpatrick, M. A., & Ritchie, L. D. (2009). Communication Theory and the Family. In: Boss, P., Doherty, W.J., LaRossa, R., Schumm, W.R., Steinmetz, S.K. (eds). *Sourcebook of Family Theories and Methods. Springer, Boston, MA*.
- Hooper, L. M., Doehler, K., Jankowski, P. J., & Tomek, S. E. (2012). Patterns of SelfReported Alcohol Use, Depressive Symptoms, and Body Mass Index in a Family Sample: The Buffering Effects of Parentification. *The Family Journal, 20(2)*, 164178.
- Ioffe, M., Pittman, L. D., Kochanova, K., & Pabis, J. M. (2020). Parent-Adolescent Communication Influences on Anxious and Depressive Symptoms in Early Adolescence. *Journal of youth and adolescence, 49(8)*, 1716–1730.
- Liu, J., Chen, X., & Lewis, G. (2011). Childhood internalizing behaviour: analysis and implications. *Journal of psychiatric and mental health nursing*, *18*(10), 884–894. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2850.2011.01743.x
- Jurkovic, G. J., & Casey, S. (2000, March). Parentification in immigrant Latino adolescents.
- Presentation in G. P. Kuperminc (Chair), Proyecto Juventud: A Multidisciplinary Study of Immigrant Latino Adolescents, symposium conducted at the meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology, San Francisco, CA.
- Jurkovic, G. J. (1997). *Lost Childhoods: The Plight Of The Parentified Child (1st ed.)*. Routledge.

- Kabat, R. (1996). A role-reversal in the mother-daughter relationship. *Clinical Social Work Journal 24*, 255–269.
- Kerig, P. K., & Swanson, J. A. (2010). Ties that bind: Triangulation, boundary dissolution, and the effects of interparental conflict on child development. In M. S. Schulz, M. K. Pruett, P. K. Kerig, & R. D. Parke (Eds.), Strengthening couple relationships for optimal child development: Lesson. *American Psychological Association.*, 59-76.
- Linda M A Van Loon 1, M. O. (2017). Parentification, Stress, and Problem Behavior of Adolescents who have a Parent with Mental Health Problems. *Family process, 56(1)*, 141–153.
- Macfie, J., McElwain, N. L., Houts, R. M., & Cox, M. J. (2005). Intergenerational transmission of role reversal between parent and child: Dyadic and family system internal working models. *Attachment & Human Development, 7*, 51-65.
- Mahzan, Arshad., Saima, Ambreen. (2024). 1. Parental psychological maltreatment, negative cognitive style and psychological distress among Pakistani adolescents. Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies, doi: 10.1080/17450128.2024.2319057
- Masiran, R., Ibrahim, N., Awang, H., & Lim, P. Y. (2023). The positive and negative aspects of parentification: An integrated review. *Children and Youth Services Review, 144*, 106709.
- Minuchin, S. M. (1969). *Families of the slums*. New York: Basic Books.
- Nuttall, A. K., Zhang, Q., Valentino, K., & Borkowski, J. G. (2019). Intergenerational Risk of Parentification and Infantilization to Externalizing Moderated by Child Temperament. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 648-661.
- Olson, D. H. (1988). Family Assessment and Intervention: The Circumplex Model of Family Systems. *Child & Youth Services, 11(1)*, 9-48.
- Parentification, p. (n.d.). Parentification, parental .
- Salome, Vanwoerden., Allison, Kalpakci., Carla, Sharp. (2017). 1. The relations between inadequate parent-child boundaries and borderline personality disorder in adolescence.. Psychiatry Research-neuroimaging, doi: 10.1016/J.PSYCHRES.2017.08.015
- Sarah, McKenna., Anna, Olsen., Dave, S., Pasalich. (2021). 5. Understanding Strengths in
- Adolescent–Parent Relationships: A Qualitative Analysis of Adolescent Speech Samples. Journal of Research on Adolescence, doi: 10.1111/JORA.12684
- Shamsaee, M. M., Hossienimajd, H. S., Brojeni, A. P., Tousi, D. G., & Ghasemzadeh, A.
- (2024). *The Psychological Effects of Parentification in Girls within Single-Parent Families*. *5*(2), 19–24. https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.pwj.5.2.4
- Shannon, L., Sachs., Osu, Extension., Kara, Newby. (2008). 1. Communicating with Your Teen.
- Simpson, E.G., Backman, A. & Ohannessian, C.M. Family Functioning and Social Media Use in Early Adolescence. *J Child Fam Stud* 32, 3459–3471 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-023-02625-w
- Tully, E. C., Iacono, W. G., & McGue, M. (2008). An adoption study of parental depression as an environmental liability for adolescent depression and childhood disruptive disorders. The American journal of psychiatry, 165(9), 1148–1154. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2008.07091438
- Van Dijk, M. P., Branje, S., Keijsers, L., Hawk, S. T., Hale, W. W., & Meeus, W. (2014). Selfconcept clarity across adolescence: longitudinal associations with open communication with parents and internalizing symptoms. . *Journal of youth and adolescence, 43(11)*, 1861–1876.

- Van Loon, L. M., Van de Ven, M. O., Van Doesum, K. T., Hosman, C. M., & Witteman, C. L. (2017). Parentification, Stress, and Problem Behavior of Adolescents who have a Parent with Mental Health Problems. *Family process, 56(1)*, 141-153.
- Vanwoorden, S., Kalpakci, A., & Sharp, C. (2017). The relations between inadequate parentchild boundaries and borderline personality disorder in adolescence. *Psychiatry research, 257,* 462–471. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2017.08.015
- Wuensch, A., Kirbach, A., Meyerding, L., Bengel, J., & Pietsch, S. (2022). Interventions for children of parents with cancer: an overview. *Current opinion in oncology, 34(4),,* 294–303.
- Yang,R.;Zeng,T. (2023).The Review of Parent-child Communication and Adolescent Depression.Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media,6,655-660.

V Tracing the Generational Memories of the Partition: A Study through Stories and Objects[1]

Meher Pannu, Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities, O.P Jindal Global University[2]

Introduction

Twelve million people were displaced as a result of the Partition of the Indian Subcontinent in the year 1947. Nearly one million died. Some 75,000 women were raped, kidnapped abducted, forcibly impregnated, thousands of families were split apart, homes burnt down and destroyed, villages abandoned (Butalia, 2017). To say the least, the Partition of the Indian subcontinent was traumatic and had a generational impact. Memories of this time have been passed down through generations creating a generational effect. This paper aims to understand the entanglement of memory, objects and stories within the second and third generations.

The memories of the Partition are either erased or being kept alive by the second and third generations through family narratives, tangible and intangible objects and collective memory. Post-memory refers to the relationship that the generation following those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma has with the experiences of those who came before them (Hirsch, 106). They "remember" these experiences through stories, images, objects and behaviours that were passed down to them. For Foucault, counter-memory is a form of resistance against the official discourses of historical continuity, so-called 'regimes of truth', and it is exercised by those who are marginalized by power (Radzobe, 2019). Through counter-memory, I understand the importance of oral histories and inherited memory. This paper uses the ideas of both post-memory and counter-memory in tracing generational memories of the Partition.

There are various "vehicles of memory" like fiction, contemporary art, cinema and theatre through which the Partition has been preserved (Confino, 1997). Films like *Gadhar* (2001), *Tamas* (1988), fiction like Saadat Hasan Manto's short stories, Amrita Pritam's writings, artwork by Zarina Hashmi, Jogen Chowdhury and theatrical performances such as *Aur Kitne Tukde* (2001) are some of the examples. More recently, over the past two decades preserving the narratives and recording oral histories gained importance as survivors of the Partition were getting older. Projects like the 1947 Partition Archive, Oral History Project by the Citizens Archive of Pakistan, *Bolti Khidki*, the Indian Memory Project and more have been recording such histories that act as repositories for the often overlooked, human dimension of the Partition.

---

2 Meher Pannu is pursuing a Postgraduate Graduate Diploma in Research and Innovation from O.P Jindal Global University. She completed her undergraduate degree in 2024, from the Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities, with a major in Fine Arts. Through her artistic practice, she questions ideas of unbelonging, movement, home and memory.

This paper focuses on the intergenerational transmission of memory through stories and objects among individuals belonging to the second and third generations. This transmission creates a liminal space where the individual is 'inheriting' these memories but not actually living them. This creation of liminal space is fascinating as we, with the memories are always inserting ourselves into these narratives trying to truly grasp the severity of the tragedy. Yet, we feel disconnect and grief even though they are not our lived experiences but stories that we now have in the form of inherited memories.

Methodology

I conducted a series of open-ended interviews over several months to explore the long-lasting impact of the Partition and its relevance today. These discussions revealed that even those who did not directly experience the Partition are deeply affected by its memories. Some cherish inherited memories using them as portals into the past, while others struggle to connect with their familial history. Many find it challenging to comprehend the horrors their ancestors endured.

Additionally, I found that photographs and objects can serve as powerful gateways to the past. To support my findings, I incorporated literature and the work of contemporary artists to analyse the primary data. The interviews were primarily conducted in-person, and I have made a conscious effort to ensure the anonymity of the participants by using only their initials. In certain instances, I omitted specific details, such as the names of ancestral villages, to respect the privacy of the interviewees. Furthermore, I used a combination of voice recordings and transcriptions, as well as detailed notes for interviews where recording was not feasible due to the interviewees' preferences.

Objects as repositories of Partition

> Only through objects I will know more. I believe that I have a stronger dependence on objects than people because of the hesitancy within my family to talk about our past.

An interviewee, K.D. said these lines to me while in conversation with her. The hesitancy that her family has in passing down memories has made her turn to material memory[3] as a way of gaining proximity with her past and identity in a way. For her, it is the objects from Pre-Partitioned India belonging to her grandparents that serve as "real tangible history."

> *Bahi khata*[4] - my *Dadaji's* notebook in Urdu and his ink pen. A briefcase that consists of a black and white photograph where two people are holding documents that look very official.

---

3 The notion that where one is from can be understood using what remains of that place opens up a highly sensitive and rich terrain that can help unpack belonging, especially if that place has now been rendered inaccessible by national borders (Malhotra, 2017).

4 Handbound diary used for ledger keeping and accounting. The *Bahi-khata* is a double-entry system of bookkeeping.

The fact that they have been preserved whether in the form of an archive or just as a keepsake is unknown to her like much of her family history. Without inherited memories, it is the materials she inherits that bring out her inquisitiveness and thirst for knowing herself better. Through her, I have been able to understand the privilege of having these memories passed down to me and stories attached to objects.

The Sewing Machine
When asked about objects, my own *Vadema (*my paternal grandmother) had much to say. Her family had had the privilege of receiving objects in a few boxes a few years after the Partition. She was a child of less than three at the time, so all of her memories are also ones that her parents and other family members passed down to her. She migrated from Okara[5] in the erstwhile West Punjab to Amritsar in the east. She made this journey in an army truck provided specifically for her family with several people other than her family.

Figure 1: The Sewing Machine, in Coonoor (2023).

The sewing machine was brought. *Mama* (maternal uncle) thought *ke* in case we didn't get any clothes there, we could buy material and stitch. She was very good at stitching. So, the machine was put there. The radio was brought so they could hear the news, and what was happening. And then they also brought a Persian carpet for anyone who wanted to sit or rest. Those things came because of the need of the hour.

---

5 Okara is a city located 163 kilometers south-east of Lahore.

From Okara to Amritsar and now miles away from where it started its journey, *Vadema's* story suggests that the reason that the sewing machine came along with them was because they had no idea where they were going and what kind of conditions they would have to live in. The sewing machine was not just an object they fled with, but it was well thought out as they were scared and believed that it was something that would be essential in the days to come. The ordinary object becomes less ordinary with migration (Auslander and Zahra, 2018). It was not an object that was thought of as sentimental in any sense at the time of the Partition but today, decades later its sentiment has been created. Looking at it through her eyes, I feel the pain, the overwhelming sense of loss, belongingness and materiality through the sewing machine.

Decanters, Vase, Dinner Sets, Crockery

Figures 2 and 3:
Dinner set/ crockery, Coonoor.
(Photograph provided by Ramneek Singh).

Figure 4:
Chinese vase, Coonoor.
(Photograph provided by Ramneek Singh).

I argue that objects change with migration specifically, forced migration. Migration sets into play competing perspectives and multiple moments in the biography of the object, and our aim throughout is not to unify or reconcile these perspectives but to draw attention to them so as to sharpen and to unsettle our understanding and to provoke further interpretation. (Auslander and Zahra, 2018). The biography of the object changes, forcing them to give up being the commodities they once were and instead be transformed into tangible repositories of memory.

Material memory refers to the tangible artefacts, sites, and objects that serve as reminders of historical events. Together, they offer a multifaceted understanding of historical events, enriching our understanding of history and memory. Contemporary artist, Atul Bhalla is interested in the relationship between memory and objects.

Figures 5 and 6: Bhalla, Atul. *Objects of Fictitious Togetherness I*, 2017. (Above: Fishman, Fig. 5 and left: Bhullar, Fig. 4).

His work is inspired by his identity as a descendant of the Partition. *Objects of Fictitious Togetherness 1* explores the interplay between memory, post-memory, and truth, and investigates how water can act as a repository of collective and individual memory. His use of ready-mades[6], the 186 brass tumblers, highlights the role that material memory plays in post-memory. The tumblers are everyday ordinary utensils, used from drinking water, to *lassi*, to *cha*, yet years later they are taken away from their original context and are on display to depict not just their materiality but memory of community that they hold. It is a visual representation of a fictional unity that defies the reality of how the government before partition had separated the Hindu *Pani* (water) drinking sources from the Muslim *Pani* ones in public spaces such as railway stations. Here, the environment created was one where all the cups of water were exhibited together, without divisions (Fishman, 2019). The brass tumblers hold memories of a time where people of different religious communities lived in harmony before the colonial period and the separation that came with it. Through this work, Bhalla shows how objects can serve as repositories of collective and individual memory and contribute to the ongoing legacy of the Partition, even for those who were born after it.

---

6 A term to describe prefabricated, often mass-produced objects isolated from their intended use and elevated to the status of art by the artist (MoMA).outh-east of Lahore.

The Chest

Figure 7: The *Sandooq*/ Chest at the interviewee's house
in Kotagiri, Tamil Nadu (2023).
(Photograph provided by the interviewee).

> My grandfather was posted to Rangoon as I.G.[7] prisons. He was in Burma
> when the war started. During the war a lot of Japanese prisoners[8] came to
> Rangoon while he was stationed there. Under him, there were two such
> prisoners. Each one had a skill, one carpentry and one read leaves after you
> drank your tea. (Interviewee B.M)

The intricately handcrafted chest made of rosewood and lined with camphor is work of art by a
Japanese prisoner captured in Burma during World War II. It is not the only one, but one of three.
The interviewee, B.M's *Nanaji* had them especially made for his daughters. These chests then
moved with him to Gujranwala which is where he was stationed at during the Partition.

> When Partition happened, *Nanaji* (grandfather) got them smuggled across
> the border. A chest came to my mother after he passed away. That portion of
> the house that reminds me of the past and I often question, Why this? And I
> can see the kind of effort that went into its creation. (Interviewee B.M)

The constant dislocation of the chest is interesting to look at, as at the time of the Partition people
were being smuggled across but the fact that B.M's *Nanaji* smuggled these three chests is
intriguing. It is clear that he had an attachment to them and the work that went into their creation.
Today, close to a century later, this chest exists in the home of his grandson in the Nilgiri Hills of
Tamil Nadu.

---

7 Inspector General of Prisons.

8 During the war, Japan attacked occupied Burma and then tried to invade India. The British-Indian army won and
took over Burma where the Japanese soldiers were captured as prisoners of war.

For the interviewee, B.M, growing up was a struggle in the post-Partition years, from his parents putting him and his siblings through school to dealing with the complete shift in their lives. He was raised on the stories of the pre-Partition days and of the Partition itself. The trauma that members of his family went through in simply crossing the border has had an overpowering influence on his life and identity. A striking story, was about his eighteen-year-old *Bijee* (paternal grandmother) and her three day train journey from Lahore to Attari. The train was packed with corpses and *Bijee*, who left home for the first time due to the *purdah* system and had a difficult time living with the memories of that journey for the rest of her life. These were memories she passed down, and they have a clear impact on the life of her grandson.

The objects exist as repositories of memories and go hand in hand with the stories and memories passed down to an individual. This section does an analysis and narrativization of specific objects from two separate individuals and how different and unique their memories in the context of those objects are.

The Photograph as An Object

Photographs are both images and physical objects that exist in time and space and thus in social and cultural experience. They have 'volume, opacity, tactility and a physical presence in the world' and are thus enmeshed with subjective, embodied and sensuous interactions (Edwards and Elart, 2004). They exist both physically and virtually. The artist, Manisha Gera Baswani's *Postcards from home* is a prime example of the creation of a memory repository through photographs. It is a documentation of 47 artists from both India and Pakistan that have been affected by the Partition directly and indirectly (Bhuyan, 2023). Many of the artists carry this inherited memory which can be seen through the postcards. Some individuals may have photographs through which they connect to their past or the past of their ancestors or use as way of looking into that time.

Something visual that harks back to that time for me is that picture (pointed at it), the only visual concrete thing that I have seen because my grandfather spun so many stories around it and I have actually sat with my *Dadaji* and he has told me where each room is. (Interviewee S.M)

One of the interviewees (S.M) I spoke to, expressed how and why photographs that have been in her family impact her. According to her, if she had not inherited memories of the Partition, her identity would feel incomplete.

Figure 9: Archival image of Mann Haveli[9], Manawla, Sheikupura, erstwhile West Punjab (at the interviewee's residence).

 For her, the "object" that connected her with her past in terms of the Partition, that evoked many emotions, was a photograph of her ancestral home in present-day Pakistan (Manawala, Sheikhupura). This photograph helps her identify with her idea of a home and lost homeland. The act in imagining her homeland itself as a place with a sense of belonging through shared speech, culture, food, rituals and practices; architectural objects and spaces; institutions and so on, is overwhelming emotion (Roy, 2020).

'*Lekin aadmi kabhi apna watan nahi bhool sakta...*' (Malhotra, 2017). Aanchal Malhotra explores the photograph as an object through the story of Nazeer Adhami whose photographs of his days at Aligarh Muslim University are the only way he fondly remembers his alma matter left behind in India. The framed photographs as objects act as portals into Pre-Partition days (Malhotra, 2017). Photographs are objects that act as very visual repositories of the past which help in acting as triggers of memory, the memory does not necessarily have to be yours but also memories that are passed down to you.

---

9 Haveli is a Punjabi term used to refer to a large private residence in Punjab both in Pakistan and North India.

One of the most popular photographs from the Partition, taken by photo-journalist Margaret Bourke White is triggering in its own way, yet acts as a portal into that time. Its acting as an object is important in terms of understanding the material memory and the collective memory that it forms through post-memory in the second and third generations.

Figure 10: Margaret Bourke-White 'Spindly,but determined old Sikh carrying ailing wife sets out on the dangerous journey to India's Border'. *The LIFE Picture Collection/Shutterstock.*

Figure 11: Margaret Bourke-White. Contact sheet showing the mass migration. *The LIFE Picture Collection/Shutterstock.*

This photograph (Figure 10) is one of a *kafila*. *Kafilas* were large groups of people that travelled on foot across the newly formed border that separated India and Pakistan. They were organized refugee convoys that stretched for 50 miles or more. The tramping of hundreds of thousands of cows, buffalos, and blistered human feet churned up the Punjab's dirt roads at the time (Hajari, 2015).

The Partition was talked about only within the four walls of my home, in a hill station in South India. As I grew older, I heard narratives from more family members that eventually led me to understand its impact not just on those directly affected it by it but by looking at people like my parents who were practically raised on this sense of loss and belongingness. Along with this particular photograph, I have seen photographs of the *kafila* that my *Dadaji* (paternal grandfather) travelled with to India.

For me, these photographs are very personal and help me understand the plight of the people with an overwhelming sense of loss that came with the forced dislocation. Bourke-White's photograph itself feels personal even though I do not know who the people are or their stories. It is the very notion that this photograph, being as popular as it is, and having seen it multiple times before looking at it more closely that I see the role photographs of the time have on our collective memories and shared pasts.

Figures 12 and 13: Images taken by *Dadaji* of the *kafila* that he travelled with from West Punjab to India (Personal family archive).

In contrast to this popular photograph are photographs that my *Dadaji* took. At the time of the Partition, he was eleven years old and had a box camera[10] with which he took these photographs. Being able to view a time that was so traumatic, through not just a photographic lens but through the eyes of my eleven-year-old *Dadaji* is what intrigues me. These images for me, truly capture Sontag's notion of images being reproached as a way of watching suffering at a distance (Sontag, 2003). This idea of watching suffering Bourke-White also captures but in a different way, as her photograph was staged. But at the same time, the *kafila* of the people in image was raided and people were killed.

Figures 14 and 15: Images taken by *Dadaji* of the *kafila* that he travelled with from West Punjab to India (Personal family archive).

Those ghostly traces, photographs, supply the token presence of the dispersed relatives (Sontag, 1977). These photographs for my sibling and me are a means of understanding and connecting with the displacement. This displacement evokes within us an enormous sense of loss and through these images are we truly able to empathize with our family and the terrible time they were forced to go through.

---

10 It is a simple camera made with two metal parts combined to form a sealed rectangular box, with a single element meniscus fixed focus lens on the front and a loading knob on a side. The controls worked differently depending on the model (Palandri, 2015).

It is evident that photographs act as repositories of memories. Partition photographs can be triggering for the second and third generations because of their inherited memories. Through this section, I have explored the photograph of the ancestral home that connects with the idea of not just a lost homeland but incompleteness in identity. This section has also explored a popular photograph associated with the displacement and images of a *kafila* my *Dadaji* travelled with to the newly formed nation of India.

The Absence and Presence of Objects
Other than the people, relationships and friendships that came with them, the other loss was of material wealth and possession. It is objects that are surrounded by and act as repositories of memory. These objects act as complete repositories only when you know the object is of that time, or have some idea about its history or value. Much value is assigned to memory, not enough to remembering. Remembering is an ethical act, has ethical value in and of itself. And, memory is, achingly, the only relation we can have with the dead (Sontag, 2003).

For the first generation, being able to leave safely was enough. The sense of loss of material wealth, I noticed amongst interviewees belonging to the second and especially the third generation. They would often narrate stories of what kind of lives their ancestors left prior to the Partition. The kind of stories they narrated would often talk of days when they had immense wealth and how they struggled after the Partition. Something *Mamiji (*maternal aunt) mentioned really stuck with me, "One person somewhere in your family line worked really hard to get you to where you are now." This goes hand in hand with the idea of immense loss and the fact that every migrant who moved across the newly formed borders had to work harder than they had, simply to regain even a fraction of what they lost. It's my *Nani (grandmother)* who holds the memory for me more than any object. The absence and remembering of the objects that could not be claimed is what holds that memory. When in conversation with my *Nani* about objects from the time, her reaction was: what are the objects, like we were happy to just save our lives. "*Hamari jaan bach gayi who hi kafi hai ghar war toh chodo (We saved our lives, that itself is enough. Forget about our homes and the rest).*

For an interviewee P.A, her grandmother acts as a repository. Persons and things are not radically distinct categories. (Appadurai, 15). Through the act of assigning an individual the role of a repository, one understands that inherited memory works differently from individual to individual and does not necessarily need to be attached to something more physical like an object. At the same time, the individual could take up the role of the object.

> When I think of the partition of Punjab, it reminds me of my *Nanaji*. His father Sardar Dhian Singh had a very precarious childhood, and for some time till the age of about six he was left at Heera Mandi, under the care of the lady who was heading Heera Mandi[11] because that was the safest place for him where he would not be killed. That is one interesting story that comes to mind while thinking of those times. (Interviewee P.A)

---

11 The brothel of Lahore is called 'Heera Mandi' (literally, 'diamond market'), and is situated inside the walled city of Lahore (Rehman, 2015).

My *Mama* often speaks about her ancestral home that was left in Pakistan. The memories attached to the house, are being kept alive only through the narratives that my *Nanima* heard from her father. The village of Qila Jiwan Singh[12], around thirty-three kilometres east of Lahore was named after my *Nanima's* ancestor. My *Mama*, *Masi* and *Nanima* have only been able to connect with this heritage of ours through select videos on YouTube. It is so close yet so distant in our lives. This very tangible history of ours exists but this inability to access it, especially seeing that it is so close in terms of distance can be frustrating. The stories revolving around Qila Jiwan Singh are how it is being kept alive within a liminal space that exists within these narratives. Through this narrative, it is evident that tangible history can become intangible as it is unreachable. At the time of the Partition, *Nanaji* was in charge of the refugee camps where he saw a lot of suffering and loss. His losses and also those of other people. Even later on, he had no interest in making a house in Chandigarh because he felt everything was here one day and gone the next. He lost interest in material things.

Mama's Nanaji completely lost attachment to material wealth and possessions but generations later, we hold objects from that time so close to us. Material history from that time is our only way of connecting with our tangible heritage. We constantly try connecting with an "imaginary homeland" lost in the past that is a "different country" (Roy, 2020). This imagined land exists in the liminal spaces we have created for ourselves through the intangible histories that have been passed down to us.

Pritika Chowdhry's art practice is centered around the creation of anti-memorials from the perspectives of counter-memory and post-memory. Her Partition Memorial Project features several works, including *Remembering the Crooked Line*. It involves alternative forms of remembrance and representation like oral histories, literature, and art, which offer different perspectives and challenge dominant narratives. Counter-memory and material memory are interconnected in the context of history and memory.

Figure 16: Chowdhry, P. (2009-10). Remembering the Crooked Line. *Nature Morte Gallery, Berlin*.

Partition *na hundi tah changa hunda*," (Had the Partition not happened, our life/circumstances would have been good) an interviewee, D.N. said this while in conversation. She was raised on stories of loss. For her, the only tangible object she has through which she connects with her heritage is a necklace[13]. What stood out to me from our conversation was the story about how her family travelled during that time. Her turbaned Sikh father was disguised to look like a Muslim by his friend so his family and he could travel in Pakistan to be able to make it to the border safely. In this journey of disguise, came with them the necklace she holds so closely. These narratives shape her life like they shape the lives of her children and the collective memory of the Partition. Her memories suggest that as a non-survivor, she has this urge to remember and preserve. At the same time, she has this hesitancy that she cannot quite overcome.

In conclusion, I argue that the absence and presence of these objects are equally important as memories are not just attached to objects, we have but the objects we have left behind. Questions of a tangible and intangible legacy are addressed in my analysis and interpretations of my conversations with interviewees. This section has further, analysed the role an individual plays in acting as a repository.

PERSONAL WORK

Figure 17: A Repository of the Partition (2024) on display during the Undergraduate Research Conference (URC).

---

13 A lot of jewellery was brought across the border through women and the role women played in the transportation of jewellery is essential as jewellery is not just sentimental but seen as a commodity and safety net.

As a student of visual art, I often tend to integrate research and practice. Through my research into the generational memory of the Partition specifically attached to the idea of materiality, I put together a mixed media installation, titled, "A Repository of the Partition" that represents the absence of objects, objects as well as photographs serving as repositories. I also address the creation of the void that the presence and absence of objects create through this work.

Figures 18 and 19: A Repository of the Partition (2024) on display during the *Undergraduate Research Conference (URC)*.

Using a process known as cyanotype[14], I reproduced archival images. It is a process that consists of several layers and its reproduction of the image stuck out to me in the context of passing down of memory. To show this absence I have also used X-ray images[15] of objects. I have also used reproductions of archival documents. This reproduction I connect with the reproduction of stories and material memory.

Conclusion

The Partition of India has left an everlasting impact on subsequent generations, shaping their identity through inherited memories. The narratives surrounding the Partition are complex and multidimensional. As with much of history, these narratives are shaped by the perspectives, contexts, and lived experiences of individuals, yet what makes Partition stories distinct is their entwinement with the intangible lost homeland. Objects and photographs emerge as powerful tangible repositories of memory. They bridge the past and the present, serving as material evidence while simultaneously representing the intangibility of loss and displacement.

This paper has investigated the everlasting effects of the Partition on the second and third generations, with a focus on how inherited memory shapes identity. Both tangible and intangible memories play a definitive role in the continual telling and retelling of Partition narratives. From interactions with several interviewees, it is evident that these memories are crucial in shaping the identities of those who inherit them. By examining these layers of memory through the lens of descendants, this paper offers a deeper understanding of how the Partition continues to resonate within families, shaping both individual and collective identities across generations.

---

14 It is a 170 year old photographic printing process that produces prints in a distinctive dark greenish-blue. The process reproduces an image or a photograph.

15 As seen in Figures 18 and 19.

References

- (2022-23). Manisha Gera Baswani: Postcards from Home. *Ashmolean Museum, Oxford*. https://www.ashmolean.org/event/postcards-from-home
- Museum. *Partition Museum: Amritsar & Delhi*. https://www.partitionmuseum.org/museum
- Readymade. *MoMA*, *The Museum of Modern Art*. https://www.moma.org/collection/terms/readymade
- Vintage Carved Trunk or Dowry Chest. *Harp Gallery*. https://www.harpgallery.com/shop/item23430.html.
- Ali, A. S. (1998). *Farewell*. In *The Country without a Postoffice*. W.W Norton.
- Appadurai, A. (2006). *The thing itself*. Public Culture. 18(1), 15-22.
- Auslander, L. Zahra, T. (2018). Circuitous Journey. In Objects of War: The Material Culture of Conflict and Displacement. *Cornell University Press*. 248-274.
- Baswani, M. G. (2007). *Postcards from Home*.
- Bhalla, A. (2017). *The lowest depths: Objects of fictitious togetherness-I*.
- Bhalla, A. (2023). The Lowest Depths Partition through Objects of Fictitious Togetherness. In Third Text. *Routledge*. 37 (2), 168–192.
- Bhullar, D. (2020). 'Games of Chance' in Goa to offer an insight into the mysteries of random coincidences. *StirWorld*.
- Bhuyan, A. (2023). Postcards from Home: a repository of artists' memories of the Partition. *Mint Lounge*.
- Bourke-White, M. Spindly but determined old Sikh carrying ailing wife sets out on the dangerous journey to India's Border. *The LIFE Picture Collection/Shutterstock*.
- Butalia, U. (2017). The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India. *Penguin Random House India*.
- Chowdhry, P. Remembering the Crooked Line: The Skin of the Nation. *Pritika Chowdhry*. https://www.pritikachowdhry.com/remembering-the-crooked-line.
- Chowdhry, P. (2009-10). Remembering the Crooked Line. *Nature Morte Gallery, Berlin*.
- Chowdhury, T. (1993). Chapter 3: Purdah and Rural Housing in South Asia. Segregation of Women in Islamic Societies of South Asia and its Reflection in Rural Housing - Case Study in Bangladesh. *Student Research: McGill University*.
- Confino, A. (1997). Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method. *The American Historical Review*. 102, (5), 1386-1403. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2171069.
- Edwards, E. Elart, J. (2004) Photographs as objects. In *Photographs, Objects, Histories*. *Routledge*.
- Fishman, S.H. (2019). Atul Bhalla: On the Physical, Historical, Religious and Political Aspects of Water. *Artists and Climate Change*.
- French, P. The Brutal 'Great Migration' That Followed India's Independence and Partition. *LIFE*.
- Gautam, Nishtha. (2015). Ismat Chughtai, thank you for being our Tedhi Lakeer. *DailyO*.
- Hajari, Nisid. (2015). Did Sikh squads participate in an organised attempt to cleanse East Punjab during Partition? *The Caravan*.
- Hirsch, Marianne. (2008). The Generation of Postmemory. *Poetics Today*. 29 (1), 103–128.
- Jogi, M. H. (2017). Amrita Pritam's Pinjar: A Feministic Perspective. *Literary Endeavour*. 8 (1), 94-97.

- Kopytoff, Igor. (1986). The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process. *The social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective*. 64-91.
- Malhotra, A. (2017). Remnants of a Separation: A History of the Partition through material Memory. *Harper Collins India*.
- Palandri, R. (2015). The Beginning: Box Cameras. *Lomography*.
- Radzobe, Z. (2019). Performance as Counter-memory: Latvian Theatre Makers' Reflections on National History. *Nordic Theatre Studies*, 31(1), 92–107.
- Roy, A. (2020). Memories and postmemories of the partition of India. *Routledge*.
- Rehman, Sabina. (2015). Walls as Transcultural Structures: Space and Place in Anglophone Narratives of Lahore. *University of Auckland*.
- Sontag, S. (1977). On photography. *Penguin Books*.
- Sontag, S. (2003). Regarding the Pain of Others. *Penguin Books*.
- Singh, S. (2016). My 1947 Box Camera Selfie. In *India of the Past: Preserving memories of India and Indians*.
- Taylor, A. (2019). The Photography of Margaret Bourke-White. *The Atlantic*.

VI Images of the Invisible - Pictures of Trauma from the Gaza Strip

Easwar Balakrishnan, Shiv Nadar University[1]

Introduction

We inhabit a world of images. Everywhere we go, everything we hear, everything we know, manifests itself in an image. But how do these images acquire their meaning? When we see an image of crisis, why does it produce a certain affective response in us? How does visuality play into the production of these images?

This paper attempts to answer this question in the context of the unfolding events in Gaza. Looking at different press photographs, from Al Jazeera to Fox, it uses Nicholas Mirzoeff's conceptualisation of images as weapons and Barthes' conceptualisation of the press photograph and traumatic images to understand the effects of images that are circulated widely, that we encounter every day. It also uses Mirzoeff's ideas of 'visuality', authority and the 'right to look' to examine the production and spread of these images. The conceptual category of weaponised images he provides through an analysis of the Iraq war is useful in studying the image economy of Gaza. Donna Haraway's 'situated knowledges' helps in thinking through Barthes' idea of the 'studium' and Hannah Arendt's idea of the 'banality' of evil signals towards the problems we face in a world where images are ubiquitous and no longer subject to visual panic.

It is divided into four sections. The first section details Barthes' conceptualisation of images, covering the concepts of denotation and connotation. It examines the different layers of meaning images carry, and how a viewer engages and is engaged by them. The second section is based on Mirzoeff's concept of weaponised images in his book *Watching Babylon: The War in Iraq and Global Visual Culture,* analysing how some images are designed to have only one meaning. In the third section, Mirzoeff's conceptualisation of visuality is discussed, to consider how images are used to create and propagate relations of power. The fourth section applies the ideas and arguments in the first three, by looking at five images of the Gaza strip, published by different sources, to see how image weapons are being employed by opposing forces to generate affective responses, and how visuality is used to justify certain relations of power and delegitimise others. A final section on counter-visuality aims to present alternative ways of seeing and operating with these images, and the practice of 'the right to look' in the context of images from Gaza today.

The Language of Images

We inhabit a world of images. Though words are essential in translating these images, as John Berger (1997) says, "Seeing comes before words." We first see a tree and describe it as such. What is an image? In abstract terms, it is "an appearance that is detached from time and place, a representation of a sight"(Berger 1997, 9). The image of a tree in our minds is formed by all the trees we have seen before. However, there is one more factor that we must consider: knowledge. Our

---

1 Easwar is an undergraduate student of history with a strong interest in anthropology. His current research focuses on the intellectual genealogies of Artificial Intelligence, tracing its historical and conceptual foundations. His broader research interests include visual media and its societal impacts, the Anthropocene, and social histories.

image of trees is also informed by what we know about them – that they are green and brown, they have leaves and so on. This knowledge comes in part from our vision, and in part from teaching. In more concrete terms, we can think of photos and paintings as images, but even stories and poems present images to us. William Butler Yeats wrote about 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' in words. But when we read it, we don't see the words in their literal form. We see the isle itself. In this way, images surround us, and we speak their language.

Photographs, however, distinguish themselves from other types of images. Unlike paintings or poems, photographs can claim to capture reality itself, acting like a mechanical eye (Berger 1997). The mediation of the painter is gone. Yes, the photographer can manipulate framing and light, but after that, there is nothing which can interrupt the camera. The actual photo is out of their hands. Roland Barthes theorises that every image carries two messages, the denotative (the reproduction of reality) and the connotative (what the spectator makes of it)(Barthes 1977). He reflects that since a photograph captures the image of a moment exactly how it was, it can claim to depict the 'real as it is,' unlike a painting where the painter's mediation means that it cannot be a perfect reproduction of reality (Barthes 1977). Susan Sontag puts it differently: "A photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stencilled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask."(Sontag 2020, 120)

Connotation, on the other hand, is the second level of meaning in a photographic message (Barthes 1977). The way the shot is framed, the lighting, what is photographed and what is not, all of this depends on the connotative message the photographer wishes to portray. This photograph is not just seen, it is read into by a public that uses its own knowledge, its own signifiers to make meaning out of it. This connotation can also be manipulated by text around the images. There is a parasitic relationship between text and image, where text 'quickens' the message of the image, and the image provides the 'denotative' proof for the text. The image no longer just illustrates the text, the text also illustrates the image(Barthes 1977).

1 - Crying Girl on the Border (John Moore, 2018)

Take the image above for example. This photograph taken by John Moore won the World Press Photo Organization's photo of the year award. What is the denotation of the photo? There is a crying girl standing next to a truck. An adult is being frisked by someone who seems to be a security or police officer. But, reading in context with the caption, the image assumes different meanings. It may represent state sponsored violence, the politics of citizenship and the ugly truth of the 'American Dream.' This is one possible connotation of the image, which comes from my own 'situated knowledge' (to use Haraway's phrasing) of the world and the caption attached to the image. It is important to acknowledge this because despite all attempts to bring an academic analysis to images, our interpretive grammar is inevitably influenced by our own cultural experiences. The same remains true for those producing the images, and those circulating it. We must, therefore, also investigate the different levels of situated knowledges that have generated a particular image in a particular way, if we are to give the most complete, but not fully complete analysis of these images.

However, for Barthes, not all images are open to connotation. He claims that there is one type of image that suspends all meaning (Barthes 1977). This is the truly traumatic image (for example – fires, shipwrecks, or deaths) of which no meaning can be made. Its sheer reality overwhelms any attempt at connotation. There is nothing to read into but the truth. Thus, the connotation is silenced in the traumatic image. This claim will be considered later in the paper, when looking at images from the Gaza strip.

Weaponising the Image
In his book *Watching Babylon*, Mirzoeff argues that images of war have become banal. No one today asks if it is ethical to take photos of war, of death, of violence. Images are no longer the subject of 'substantive debate' (Mirzoeff 2005, 68). There is no visual panic. Images themselves have become commodities, they are exchanged and used without hesitation. We do not think twice when we receive a certain image as to why it is composed in a particular way, why it uses certain colours, why it shares a certain design sense. The grammar of the image is embedded in us and thus we accept it thoughtlessly. This harkens back to Hannah Arendt's idea of evil operating through banality. In her analysis of the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem, Arendt observes that Eichmann, who was deeply involved in implementing the 'final solution', did not appear to be a monster, he was a man doing his duty thoughtlessly. It was in this banal form that evil propagated itself, and someone as passionate and hateful as Hitler would not have been successful if he did not have, by his side, men who were mindlessly doing their jobs. Thus, Arendt concludes, evil exists in the banal. It is when one stops thinking, when one simply goes through the motions, that evil can lurk within. Now that images have become banal, and no one gives a second thought to the images they consume, they become capable of evil.

Think of the commercial image, for example, McDonald's famous golden arches. These images are open to participation, they invite the viewer to debate and discuss the many meanings which may exist within. "To think about an advertisement, even critically, is to bring oneself to the edge of buying." (Mirzoeff, 2005, 76) By simply engaging with the image, the viewer gets closer to desiring the product than if they had never consumed the image at all. The more one talks about the image, the more the product is desired. The point of the image is to create this conversation. Through

Barthes' framework, we can see that it is this connotative potential of the image that attracts viewers to it. He says, when speaking of an advertising image, "What gives this system its originality is that the number of readings of the same lexical unit or lexia (of the same image) varies according to individuals."(Barthes 1977, 46) In this sense, the weaponised images used in war differ.

Mirzoeff talks about how military and political actors have tapped into the image economy. Since images have become banal, they are able to circulate as many images of their operations as they please. They are no longer debated. But the images they circulate have a different rhetoric behind them. Mirzoeff says that images have become a weapon; the development of image technology and military coincided in many ways, and with this development the image came to be militarised. This development was not the result of a global conspiracy; it was just "a convergence of medium and message such that each truly found itself for the first time"(Mirzoeff 2005, 73).

War images are hard, flat and opaque. They function properly, as Mirzoeff says, when they are simply accepted without resistance. So that this is the case, they are designed to control the connotative power of the image itself. The word opaque is used with this in mind, one cannot see through the images; one cannot read meanings into them. In this sense they are performative – "the war image… does what it says it is going to do" (Mirzoeff, 2005, 77). This is why they are so impactful, once seen, there is nothing the viewer can do. The flood is so extreme that there is no time to discuss any image before being hit with the next one. Through sheer relentlessness, visuality, a control over what people see is manufactured. How does the viewer respond? By dispersing the image away from oneself. However, this does not reduce its power. The rhetoric of the image persists. Walter Benjamin talks about the movie frame in a similar way. Compared to a painting, which invites the viewer to speculate, the viewer's eye has only just seen the movie frame than it moves on to the next one. The spectator is shocked by the image; their thoughts are replaced by these images. The flood of war-images produces a similar effect. As Benjamin says of the film, it hits the spectator *like a bullet*.(Benjamin 1969, 17)

What matters with these images is not their truth or veracity. Everybody takes it for granted that these images are probably manipulated in some way, doctored for the optics of the state, with a geopolitical agenda behind them. All that matters is whether these images express a sense of the nation. The citizen must take a pledge in the rhetoric of the image, whether true or false, in the same way a couple takes a pledge in a marriage, to be with each other, in sickness or in health. This means that the image becomes an event of identification, whether you buy into the image determines whether you identify with your nation. To discredit the image is to discredit the government circulating it; it is an attack on the nation itself. These images thus establish the authority of a state through visuality(Mirzoeff 2005). Why are no images of dead American soldiers shared in America?

Think of the images shared by the Israeli Defence Forces. They're usually of a group of soldiers, starting to move towards their target. The impact of this image is like a bullet. It serves as proof of an attack that has already happened. Once this image is produced and circulated, there is no stopping it. Barthes provided the famous example of a photograph of Lewis Payne who attempted to assassinate Secretary of State W.H. Seward Alexander Gardner in 1865. He was photographed in his cell once arrested. It is this photograph Barthes analyses. For him, the *studium* (that is, the part

of the image which interests us because of our own cultural inclinations and pre-knowledge) in the image is of course the handsome young man himself. The punctum (which is what stands out from the image, almost pricks us in a way) is the fact that he is going to die. Barthes states, ""He is dead and he is going to die ...""(Barthes 2006, 95). The images shared by the Israeli Defence Force have the same effect. The soldiers who, in the photograph are charging, have probably already reached, cleared and set up shop in the area. The image captures death and presents it to the viewer in future perfect tense; it is a psychological attack on the Palestinian people.

2 - Israeli Defence Forces, 2024

The horizon they head towards is a city. This is the mantra of counterinsurgency, population control. Clear the space, occupy it, establish your own government (Mirzoeff 2011). These are complemented by 'ELIMINATED' images, in an almost videogame manner showing which member of Hamas they most recently 'found and eliminated.' This speaks, perhaps, to the way that soldiers are trained, through videogame simulators and immersive 3D environments. Troops have often described combat's similarities to videogames, and UAVs happen to use the same joystick as video game controllers. (Mirzoeff 2011) It only lends more to the banality of such images. For the Israelis, their army is a symbol of national pride; the patriotic citizen can identify with this image.

3 ELIMINATED: The Head of Manpower in Hamas' Military Wing, Ra'ad Thabat.
(Israeli Defense Forces Twitter, 2024)

Think of the image constructed above. There is no blood, no death in the image itself. The denotation has no sign of violence. Through this control over the denotation, the connotation is manufactured. What we see is an extreme, head-on closeup. It looks like a mugshot; there is already a criminalising taking place. The word 'eliminated' itself is a clean word, not associated with the negative connotations that a word like 'killed' would be. The text tells us the crimes committed, without which this image would mean nothing. This is Barthes' parasitic relationship in play.

The Right to Look
The images above help us conceptualise visuality as the supplement that makes authority seem self-evident, through control of the image's connotative power. The ELIMINATED photo, for example, tells us the importance of this man that has been killed, the weapons he created, the ties he had with other leaders of Hamas and his seniority. However, as mentioned above, what we don't see is the actual violence of his death. We are told this man deserved to die, through the text that supports the image, and the image itself presents itself as a mugshot, criminalising him. But his death and the actual conditions of his existence, remain unseen. Recently, these images have become even more minimal. The image below, shared on the 'elimination' of two Hezbollah members, loses any humanity entirely. There is not even a face to attach to these deaths anymore, only a writeup accompanying the image talking about what they did to deserve to die.

4. Hashem Safieddine, Head of the Hezbollah Executive Council and Ali Hussein Hazima, Commander of Hezbollah's Intelligence Headquarters, were eliminated during a strike on Hezbollah's main intelligence HQ in Dahieh approx. 3 weeks ago. (Israeli Defence Forces Twitter, 2024)

We can see through these images how authority authorizes itself, through visuality. This requires three mechanisms: classifying, separating and aestheticizing (Mirzoeff 2011). First, it names, categorises and defines. We see this classification at play, through categories such as terrorists and civilians which are often employed. Second, it separates the groups that have been classified. For example, the Palestinians who are moved into specific camps. Finally, visuality aestheticizes. It makes the classifications and separations created 'seem' right, through repeated experiences and historical appeals, which generate what Frantz Fanon calls "an aesthetic of respect for the status quo" (Mirzoeff 2011, 476). The Israeli Defence Forces generate respect for the status quo through the establishing of Hamas as a terrorist group. The idea created is that they are saving the

Palestinian civilians from the insurgents within. The hierarchy of cultures is naturalised. These mechanisms, together, comprise what Mirzoeff calls the 'complex of visuality.'

The end goal of the combined operations undertaken by counterinsurgencies is generating legitimacy. These operations, such as combat, security forces, liberal governance are all subsumed under 'information operations.' It is this information that produces legitimacy, and it shapes the perception of those leading counterinsurgency into reality. So, the borders and separations between Israel and Palestine, for example, are classifications that are by their own nature legitimate, since the processes of information generation themselves are controlled by those wanting to impose these classifications (Mirzoeff 2011). "In 1977, the Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan declared that the issue of the Palestinian territories should be reframed: "The question was not, "What is the solution?" but "How do we live without a solution?""(Mirzoeff 2011, 495)

Israel frames its actions through this idea of counterinsurgency. They continually insist that their targets are the Hamas insurgents, and the Palestinian people need to be protected by them too. In this context of permanent counterinsurgency, what is the 'right to look'? It does not just mean the literal right to be able to see, but it is a claim to autonomy, political subjectivity and a collective identity that sheds the separations created through visuality. It is to look back on the structures of power, acknowledge them, and resist them. How is political subjectivity claimed through the right to look? It is through the recognition of the other. It is to allow the other to find you, to make yourself available to be seen as much as trying to see others. This look expresses a form of solidarity or collective that shatters the separation imposed by visuality. Above, we saw how images become weapons, through a control of the denotative, control connotative meaning. They invisibilise certain things, in the case of the ELIMINATED images, the humans themselves. Here is where the right to look is important. Recognising the other's human existence, visibilising them, that is how we can claim the right to look. It is confronting the police who tell us to move on and that there is nothing to see, even though there clearly is. It is not a fight against censorship, but a fight against visuality's exclusive claim to be able to look (Mirzoeff 2011).

If authority justifies itself through complexes of visuality, the right to look attempts to claim autonomy from it, rejecting the classifications and separations imposed (Mirzoeff 2011a). It views 'right' and law as different, with right being fundamental to the human condition and therefore innate to every human, and law being an imposition of authority. The right to look then, is the right to the real. It grapples with visuality's creation of a reality that exists, but should not, while trying to create one that should exist, but does not. "The "realism" of counter-visuality is the means by which one tries to make sense of the unreality created by visuality's authority while at the same time proposing a real alternative"(Mirzoeff 2011, 485). It is this unreality which we must be cynical of.

How does the right to look manifest itself in images? The phone is ubiquitous today. Every day on Instagram we receive a flood of images directly from Gaza. This increased access to the camera, to be able to share images has led to an attempt to reclaim the right to look. A collective against the dominant visuality is formed. The Israeli Defence Forces' images are no longer hegemonic, they must respond to a different set of images being produced by the Palestinian people themselves. We see this in the widespread popularity of the 'All Eyes on Rafah' campaign.

In May 2024, as Israel wreaked more and more havoc on the people and the land of Gaza, public opinion, or atleast, progressive opinion shifted more and more firmly against Israel. Following a Hamas attack on Tel Aviv, on May 26, Israel carried out an airstrike on a camp in Rafah, killing 45 and leaving over 200 wounded. The UNRWA condemned this action, as the camp was for aiding those who had been displaced because of the conflict. This led to the start of a campaign on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, with major celebrities sharing a viral phrase, "All Eyes on Rafah".
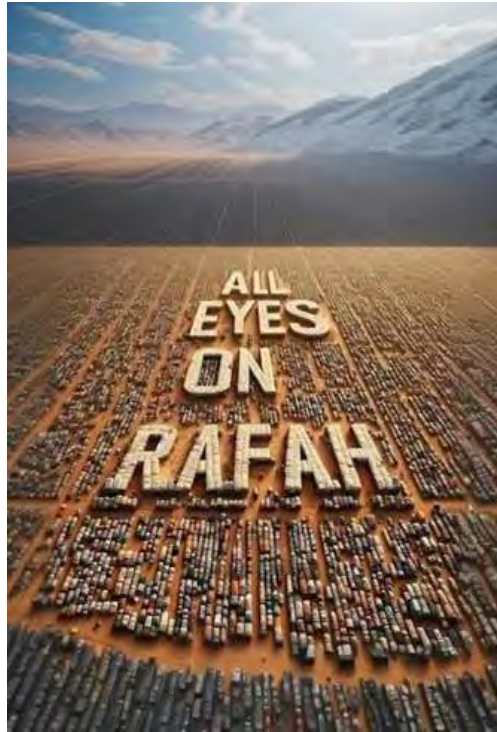
5 - 'All Eyes on Rafah', Instagram 2024

This image would make the rounds through all social media, causing controversy and debate on different aspects such as the morality of sharing images of war, the specific focus being granted to Rafah over other humanitarian crises, the legitimacy of celebrities (who profit from the very businesses that propagate global counterinsurgency) sharing these images and so on. But what interested me in this image was the phrase itself. The image still adopts an aerial view, and the balance of power associated with it; it is AI generated, which perhaps forms some separation from the reality of the situation. This means it has its limitations. But the idea of all eyes being on Rafah, of the global public turning its gaze onto this camp for the displaced, of people across the world reclaiming their right to look at what is happening produces a counter-visuality, as we willingly and intentionally turn our sight to that which authority shrouds through visuality. The image has its own problems, but perhaps marks a shift in global attitudes towards visuality, and an attempt to reclaim the right to look; an acknowledgement that we must see.

Images of Gaza
What does Gaza look like then? We've all seen images floating around the internet; on Instagram, in the news, everywhere. Images of violence have truly become banal; we see them and scroll past. And yet, these images have some impact on us. What we see in that glance is being mediated to produce a certain connotation, as Barthes would say . Like any press photograph, the choice of

photo, the text around it, the caption given to it, these different structures combine to become the signifier of the overall message being conveyed. These images are also vital in the construction of the complex of visuality, the project of dominant Western authority. Most of them classify and separate and aestheticize authority in some way, to produce legitimacy for the dominating powers in the region.

The images below are accompanied by their original captions.

6 - People watch as the US military carries out its first aid drop over Gaza, in Gaza City, March 2 (Kosay Al Nemer, 2024)

We see children watching from the rooftop as parachutes drop aid. Is there a sense of awe in what they are seeing? Or perhaps a sense of desire or relief? What is being visibilised here? Certainly not the camps with cramped spaces and horrible living conditions. No, what is visibilised is the aid from the west, a portrayal not only of power but of goodness. What is visibilised are children, the universal idea of innocence. As the USA continues to abstain from voting for a ceasefire, it must create an image of itself as the 'hero.' An image like these furthers the US' project of visuality. The complex of visuality is clearly operationalised here. Though it clearly classifies and separates itself from the Palestinians down below, it also aestheticizes itself, by showing its aid and compassion. The authority the US holds becomes naturalised through this visuality. By turning our eyes away from the suffering that is happening in the camps, and instead on the compassion they display, the project of visuality succeeds once again. The US is legitimised as a good actor. Compare it to this photo from Al Jazeera:

7 - This aerial view of the makeshift tent camps housing Palestinians displaced by intense Israeli bombardment on the Gaza Strip on December 9, 2023. (Said Khatib, 2023)

Here the camps are visibilised, and so the image produces a completely different effect on the spectator. We can see the lack of space and its cramped hectic nature. Tents are laid out in a fashion that seems completely random. Lots of people are milling about. Through framing and choice of subjects, these two images convey different meanings about the conflict, one presenting an image of goodness (the authority carrying out legitimate actions) and the other presenting one of oppression. However, the aerial view flattens dimensions, and puts the spectator in a position of power, as well as physical distance from the camps themselves. As Mirzoeff says, "visualized-information war produces necro- political regimes of separation controlled from the air, not the ground." Our perspective, though definitely better in image quality, is the same as UAVs that governments use to strike people down. No effort is required from us, in perceiving depth or dimensions. The complex of visuality is in action again, classifying people as belonging to these camps, separating them into it from us, and aestheticizing our own position. This is the perspective of the general. We don't want to be down there now, do we?

What about images of trauma as Barthes would traditionally define them?

8 - An injured Palestinian woman, covered in dust and blood, hugs an injured girl at the hospital following the Israeli bombardment of Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip (Belal Khaled, 2023)

This is a particularly shocking image to see. Everything that the image-weapons hide, this image shows; blood, dust, an expression of disbelief, a desperation we can see as the mother or grandmother of the girl clutches her tightly. Through this image, we share this moment of pain with them. We take on the 'collective form' (Mirzoeff 2011, 477).

Often these images feature children, as an appeal to innocence and purity. This of course, takes away the child's own agency, they become an innocent bystander, even if they were part of or fought against the event. Barthes' claims about images of trauma are disproven when we look at the images being circulated. Death, destruction, and violence are commonplace in these photos, most of them are very graphic and yet, they are used by the press to push certain narratives and exercise power. However, there is a different argument that can also be made. It is the connotative silence of the image, the fact that nothing can be said of it at all, that gives it its power. The silence of the image itself acquires a social grammar, in a world where we are flooded with images that are anything but silent.

Here it produces counter-visuality. It is imaginaries like these that governments want to hide, that the police keep behind yellow tape. If visuality is held to be traditionally masculine, justifying an authority that has a patriarchal genealogy, then it is no surprise that such images, that help us reclaim the right to look and help those invisibilised reclaim the right to be seen generally star feminine figures. This is the tension between visuality and the right to look. This close-up shot forces us to acknowledge their existence, their political subjectivity. It demystifies authority; the pain of this image makes us question the legitimacy of those who have caused this.

Conclusion

The images above speak for themselves. They carry certain messages, as Barthes' claims. Mirzoeff suggests that their widespread circulation, gamification and consumption leads to them acquiring a 'banality.' We know what we are supposed to take away from the image. And yet, these images, which appeal to a certain idea of power (or lack thereof), motivate affective responses in their spectators. Barthes' idea of the traumatic image suspending meaning is no longer true. These traumatic images serve as weapons just like any other, potentially producing a greater affect due to their graphic nature. This visual culture through which power is fostered, has developed through the militarisation and commodification of the image, as Mirzoeff elucidates in his book (Mirzoeff 2005). However, it is important to note that the positionality of the spectator is also important. As Donna Haraway points out, knowledge is situated, limited and local (Haraway 1988). One's understanding and reading of an image comes from their context in place and time. But there is another layer in these images, they classify, separate and aestheticize authority. As seen in the examples above, certain imaginaries are pushed and others forbidden, to generate a legitimacy to the status quo, the world as is and the leaders who exercise authority.

We must study not just what an image is, and what it visibilises. It may be more important to study what an image invisibilises; the perspectives, details and ideas we lose out on when an image is produced. Visuality justifies authority; the images we encounter on the daily are designed to aestheticize our current conditions and claim the right to look exclusively for authority itself. We must acknowledge our own position, what we have been taught to look at and what we have been taught to ignore. Only by exercising our 'right to look', by examining the reality constructed by

visuality, uniting politically and resisting the separations enforced by it (Mirzoeff 2011), can we move past this visuality, and destroy the 'empire of camps.'

Of course, as Mirzoeff says, visuality intensifies itself in response to counter-visuality. As the global public tries more aggressively to reclaim its right to look, global authority will intensify its efforts to classify, separate and aestheticize. We've seen this historically, the way that visuality has intensified in its efforts after colonialism, then the cold war, post 9/11, along the rise of the digital age. Today we have CCTV cameras everywhere, watching itself is visibilised (Mirzoeff 2011). The more we fight for the right to our own existence, the more backlash we will face. I am uncertain whether the outcome of the movement for the right to look will be positive, yet I am hopeful; we must try, we must look.

List of Images (in order of appearance)

- Moore J. 2018. *Crying Girl on the Border,* digital image, World Press Photograph, accessed 1 April 2024, https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo-contest/2019/john-moore-soy/1
- Israel Defense Forces (@IDF). 2024. *24hr operational update.* Twitter, March 28, 2024. https://twitter.com/IDF/status/1773279150033236123
- Israel Defense Forces (@IDF). 2024. *ELIMINATED: The Head of Manpower in Hamas' Military Wing, Ra'ad Thabat.* Twitter, March 29, 2024. https://twitter.com/IDF/status/1773477401625866482
- Israel Defense Forces (@IDF). 2024. *Hashem Safieddine, Head of the Hezbollah Executive Council and Ali Hussein Hazima, Commander of Hezbollah's Intelligence Headquarters, were eliminated during a strike on Hezbollah's main intelligence HQ in Dahieh approx. 3 weeks ago.* Twitter, October 23, 2024. https://x.com/IDF/status/1848827621510947040
- The Conversation. 2024. *The image reads 'All Eyes On Rafah' in large block letters.* May 31, 2024. https://theconversation.com/all-eyes-on-rafah-sharing-images-of-war-comes-with-a-moral-responsibility-what-can-we-make-of-this-ai-generated-anomaly-231271
- Nemer, Kosay Al. 2024. *People watch as the US military carries out its first aid drop over Gaza, in Gaza City, March 2,* digital image, Reuters, accessed 1 April 2024, https://www.reuters.com/pictures/photos-of-the-month/pictures-month-march-2024-03-31/RHXGEOE6RVNRZKFEFT7JS4ZJWE/
- Khatib, Said. 2023. *This aerial view of the makeshift tent camps housing Palestinians displaced by intense Israeli bombardment on the Gaza Strip on December 9, 2023,* digital image, AFP, accessed 26 March 2024, https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/12/25/photos-israel-palestine-war
- Khaled, Belal. 2023. *An injured Palestinian woman, covered in dust and blood, hugs an injured girl at the hospital following the Israeli bombardment of Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip,* digital image, AFP, accessed 26 March 2024, https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/12/25/photos-israel-palestine-war

References

- Barthes, Roland. 1977. *Image, Music, Text: Essays*. Translated by Stephen Heath. 13. [Dr.]. London: Fontana.
- ———. 2006. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Translated by Richard Howard. 26. print. New York, NY: Hill and Wang [u.a.].
- Benjamin, Walter. 1969. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books.
- Berger, John. 1997. *Ways of Seeing*. 37. pr., 1. publ. 1972 by British Broadcasting Corp. and 1977 by Penguin Books. London: British Broadcasting Corp.
- Haraway, Donna. 1988. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14 (3): 575–99. https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066.
- Mirzoeff, Nicholas. 2005. *Watching Babylon: The War in Iraq and Global Visual Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- ———. 2011a. "The Right to Look." *Critical Inquiry* 37 (3): 473–96. https://doi.org/10.1086/659354.
- ———. 2011b. "The Right to Look." *Critical Inquiry* 37 (3): 473–96. https://doi.org/10.1086/659354.

VII   Utopia as the Desire to Desire: A Love Affair with Theory

Manhar Bansal, National Law School of India University, Bengaluru[1]*

"[H]umans have always desired beyond the here and now in search of something and/or somewhere better. In 1516, Thomas More named this desire utopia" (Storey, 2019, p. 5).

Introduction: Reviving Utopia in the Time of Late Capitalism

The narratives of the "end of ideology" and capitalist triumph that accompanied the end of the Cold War generated a profoundly anti-utopian attitude in public discourse and political culture (Levitas, 2013, p. 7; see also, on the current dystopian outlook, Vieira, 2022, and on the proclamation of the death of utopia after the Cold War, Shklar 2020). We live today at a "conjuncture of cascading crises" and the only utopian visions of our time are either "fantasies of exodus from a burning planet" through space travel or "Matrix-like dematerialisation" through the proliferation of metaverses (Lockie, 2023b). As for liberalism, it sees "radical utopianism" as either a failure or an authoritarian drive toward a particular vision of perfection. In return, all it has to offer is a more "realistic" or "practical" utopia which is readily attainable within the present world (Novak, 2022, pp. 147-150). In this light, Fredric Jameson argues that the problem with our world today is not so much capitalism itself but rather the almost universal belief that there is no other alternative (Jameson, 2005, p. xii). Thus, what haunts us today is lack of willingness, let alone the courage, to imagine other worlds. We are all subjects of capital; sometimes a little reluctantly, sometimes happily, but seldom, if ever, defiantly. We are all victims of an impossible inability to imagine, and witnesses to utopia's death.

Ever since More's Utopia was published in 1516, the term utopia has come to acquire varied meanings. Broadly, two lines of descent can be drawn—one concerned with the realisation of a particular utopian program and the other concerned with the underlying utopian impulse for other futures (Jameson, 2005, pp. 3-4). In this essay, I concern myself with the latter. I use this juncture of the supposed death of utopia to consider questions relating not to any particular utopian vision but to the very "commitment to imagining possible utopias as such" (Jameson, 2005, p. 217), what Ruth Levitas calls utopia as method (Levitas, 2013). My aim in this essay is to revive utopia in the time of late capitalism through the inculcation of the desire to desire the impossible.

This essay emerges also out of a personal journey of learning, reading, and thinking with and about theory. My love affair with theory, as I call it, generates utopian possibilities, but also continues to

---

haunt me with its inability to be "purposeful." Theory has allowed me to expand my imaginative horizons and experience things I would not have otherwise experienced. Yet, I continue to ask myself—what is the value of the kind of intellectual work that has a pretense of change, revolution, and utopia, but which bears no visible relation to the "real world"? When I go back home and talk about "other worlds" with my family, people tell me that my theory and their reality are radically different. I find myself unable to translate the expanse that theory generates in my mind, to those around me. I see everywhere around me an aversion, an indifference, almost a suspicion, toward thinking of elsewheres, to which I too am a frequent victim. Yet, amidst this tiredness of thought and lack of imagination, I find some solace in theory. Theory represents, in my view, a gateway which can unlock the desire to desire that resides in each one of us. I use this essay to argue that by allowing us to grapple with our ideological incarceration, theory gives us the imaginative possibilities of transcending ideology's prison walls even as we continue to live within them in our everyday lives.

I begin this essay by discussing the relationship between ideology and utopia through a combined reading of Karl Mannheim, Louis Althusser, and Paul Ricouer. Following Ruth Levitas's account of utopia as method, I argue that utopia today must be recovered from the ruins of capitalist ideology. In particular, I am keen to assert that theoretical imagination, nurtured in spaces of learning like the classroom, gives us the tools to perform this task of recovery, and then reconstruction. Finally, I turn to theory's ostensible opposite—the "real"—to argue against the traditional distinction drawn between "abstract" and "concrete" utopias. Instead, I argue that utopia as method forms the common thread between theory's "abstract" imaginations about an Elsewhere, and ordinary people's orientations toward their "concrete" lives in the Here and Now.

Ideology and Utopia: Is There an Outside, Do We Need One?

In his 1929 book Ideology and Utopia, sociologist Karl Mannheim argues that both ideologies and utopias are "situationally transcendent" ideas that bear an "incongruous relationship" with reality. The difference is that unlike ideology, utopia is not only incongruous but it also has the tendency to shatter the prevailing order of things. However, which ideas are ideological and which ones utopian is a determination that can only be made in hindsight (Mannheim, 1954, pp. 173-176). Regardless, both are necessary for historical change. Mannheim argues that only a world "no longer in the making" could afford a "matter-of-factness" which has no place for either ideologies or utopias (Mannheim 1954, pp. 231, 235-236). Therefore, while Mannheim does not discount the importance of ideologies or utopias, his understanding provides theoretical ground for the oft-repeated argument that utopias are nothing but less-dominant or unpopular ideologies. If late capitalism is an ideology, so is the feminist utopia, and vice versa. This equivocation fails to capture both—the particular power of ideology and the radical nature of utopia and utopianism. Ultimately, Mannheim sees both ideologies and utopias as distortions of reality which must be uncovered through a "sociology of knowledge" (Sargent, 2008, p. 256, citing Mannheim, 1954, p. 87).

It becomes useful then to consider a more powerful account of ideology which we get from the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, writing in the aftermath of the 1968 Revolution in France. Althusser understands ideology as the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. The work of ideology is to interpellate individuals as its "always-already" subjects,

such that they "go by themselves" in a manner that reproduces the dominant relations of production (Althusser, 2014, especially the essay entitled "On Ideology"). Terry Eagleton argues that unlike in the traditional Marxist conception of "false consciousness," in Althusser there is no question of truth or falsehood, and thus, no question of "distortion" in the sense in which Mannheim uses it (Eagleton, 1991, p. 18). Therefore, while Mannheim views ideology as an incongruous relation to reality, opposed to "matter-of-factness," Althusser sees it as essentially the enterprise which generates the powerful consensus that is the "matter-of-factness."

This is a thread that Paul Ricoeur picks up in his Lectures on Ideology and Utopia, and other writings. Channelling Mannheim, Ricoeur argues that while ideologies relate mainly to dominant groups, utopias relate to ascendant ones; and while ideologies are directed toward the past, utopias look into the future (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 273). Ricoeur views the relationship between ideology and utopia as essentially "an interplay of the fundamental directions of the social imagination" (Ricoeur, 1976, 27). Thus, while ideology works to conserve existing structures, the function of utopia is to subvert them and to "give the force of discourse" to other possibilities (Ricoeur, 1976, pp. 23-24). He argues that utopia gives us a place of "nowhere" which allows us to step outside ideology, cast an "exterior glance" upon it and make strange our familiar reality (Ricoeur, 1976, p. 25).

Ricoeur's formulation forces us to ask the dreaded question: can we ever step outside ideology to begin with? A popular reading of Althusser would tell us that there is no "outside" ideology for we are "always-already" its subjects (Li, 2017, pp. 58-59). In Jameson's words, "our imaginations are hostages to our own mode of production" and at best, utopias can make us aware of our impossible mental and ideological imprisonment (Jameson, 2005, p. xiii). In response to this view, Lyman Sargent argues that Ricoeur's formulation allows for a critique of ideology from within, thus dispensing the need to step outside ideology (Sargent, 2008, p. 269). In this essay, I agree with Sargent and argue that there is room within Althusser for conceiving revolutionary possibilities from within the prison walls of ideology. If we understand ideology not as distortion, but as a configuration of social imagination of our real conditions of existence, it is possible to poke at the limits of this imagination using a counter possibility. The name of this possibility is utopia.

Althusser concludes his essay "On Ideology" by writing that when "nothing is happening," it means that the ideological state apparatuses are working to perfection. However, every now and then, "events happen" which "someday or the other, after a long march" lead to revolution (Althusser, 2014, p. 206). It is this possibility of error, clumsiness, swerve, and unexpectedness that has led scholars to argue that Althusser's conception of ideology is not a "fortress" but a "paradoxical space" where anything—including revolution—can happen (Li, 2017). Crucially, for this essay, Althusser presents the arena of philosophy (what I am calling theory) as the site for such an encounter. He argues that the purpose of philosophy is to "wage a strategic and tactical war against the adversary's theoretical forces" (Althusser, 2017, pp. 160-163) and while philosophy cannot substitute the political work of creating social apparatuses to generate newer forms of ideology, the philosopher can, through the labour of her thought, "manage to get things right" (Szeman, 2017, p. 87).

Carolyn Lesjak writes: "now is a fitting time to return to Althusser with theory … in ruins" (Lesjak, 2017, p. 51). In Althusser, the ritual practices in which a primary ideology is reproduced can

produce, as a by-product, a "secondary ideology" which is the stuff of revolt, revolution, and the "acquisition of revolutionary consciousness" (Althusser, 2014, p. 187). I argue that using the tools of theoretical imagination, this revolutionary or utopian consciousness can be cultivated in the ruins, the "by-products" of capitalist ideology.

In the Ruins of Capitalist Time

I find it useful here to turn to Ruth Levitas's much-celebrated work Utopia as Method (2013). Levitas understands utopia not as a goal to be achieved but as method which comprises three elements—the archaeological mode, the ontological mode, and the architectural mode. Utopia as archaeology entails the excavation of the shards and fragments of visions of good society that are buried in existing programmes and policies. Utopia as ontology involves the unlocking of human potentialities and ways of being blocked by current socio-political arrangements. Finally, utopia as architecture means imagining alternative futures and other visions of good society, which in turn must be subjected to archaeological critique (Levitas, 2013, pp. 154-155).

Althusser argues that the kind of knowledge which breaks with ideology emerges in moments of conjuncture marked by upheaval in both scientific and political events (Althusser, 2014, pp. 15-16; see also Wegner, 2017, 94). Dare I say that we, located as we are in the time of late capitalism, maybe at one such conjuncture—allowing us the possibility to imagine a new philosophy, and thus, a new world? Using Levitas's account of utopia as archaeology, I would argue that what is required of us at the current juncture is to recover utopia from the ruins of our late capitalist present.

The idea of recovering utopia from the ruins of the present is not particularly new. In his foundational text The Principle of Hope (1954), Ernst Bloch argued that there are emancipatory utopian elements—what he called the utopian surplus—in all ideology. An "anticipatory consciousness" is what is needed to channel this unrealised surplus and recover lost possibilities for a better future (Kellner, 2012, pp. 84-86; see also Moir, 2018). Our present moment is one of constant crisis—genocide, climate change, political instability, economic depression, social unrest—the list is endless. Much of these can be traced back to workings of capital's logic. Capital moves through our life worlds as a force that leaves behind abandonment, destruction, and crisis. Indeed, crisis is the very name of capital—it breaks down anything that comes in its way. Marx and Engels wrote in The Communist Manifesto (1848) about the breaking down of feudal property relations by capital: "They had to be burst asunder; they were burst asunder" (Marx & Engels, 2010, p. 17).

Following Anna Tsing, I want to suggest then that we inhabit the ruins of capital. In The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins (2015), Tsing argues that the "earthwide condition," "the situation of our world," is one of precarity and ruin (Tsing 2015, p. 4). "Ruin," she writes, "has become our collective home" (Tsing, 2015, p. 3). While Tsing understands ruins as "spaces of abandonment" (Tsing, 2015, p. 6), with Laura Bear, I would frame ruins as "time-scapes"—geographies of destruction, abandonment, and decay produced as capital moves through space and time (Bear, 2017). The question of time is important. It is possible to slip into thinking of ruins exclusively as entities of/from the past, as it might appear, for example, from Tsing's reference to a "history of ruin" (Tsing, 2015, p. 213). However, I understand ruin and ruination as an ongoing condition of the present. In capital, we are always-already in ruins. It is

owing to this contemporary internality of ruin that Tsing writes: "We have the challenge of living in that ruin, ugly and impossible as it is" (Tsing, 2015, p. 213)[2]. If capital is a ruin-machine[3], the task of utopia as archaeology—to bring back Levitas—is to use our critical gaze and dig from these ruins, alternative ways of being and living—the stuff of utopia as ontology and architecture. This does not require us, as discussed before, to step outside ideology but to investigate its limits and its underside, to "shatter the obvious" and collect the broken shards in a gesture of recovery and reconstruction. In Georgia Lockie's words, "The polluted city, the ruins of modernity, contain utopian surplus still, the beautiful detritus with which we might reimagine the future once more" (Lockie, 2023b).

Utopia as the Desire to Desire
In Utopia as Method, Ruth Levitas argues that "the core of utopia is the desire for being otherwise, individually and collectively, subjectively and objectively" (Levitas, 2013, p. xi). This "more open definition of utopia" makes the form, function, and content of specific utopias "historically variable" (Levitas, 2013, p. 4). Thus, what matters is not whether utopia is a literary work or a vision for the future, a tool of critique or of change, a socialist or a liberal utopia. Instead, utopia becomes, in the words of Miguel Abensour, the "education of desire"—"to teach desire to desire, desire better, to desire more, and above all to desire in a different way" (Levitas, 2013, pp. 4-5).

I find this expression of utopia as the desire to desire so very beautiful and profound, and more relevant for our times than ever before. In a world where the forces of late capitalism continue to devour human life and imagination on all possible fronts, utopia as method, as desire, simply calls upon us to gather the courage and the willingness to (re)imagine. The crucial point here is that utopia as method allows us to imagine without having to bear either the expectation or the burden of "actual change"—of drawing up a plan, framing a policy, or jumping into political action. This is not to say that these other things are not important, of course they are. The point, however, is that the significance and the infinite possibility of the first and inaugural "step" if you will, of imagination itself, is lost on many of us, myself included. We are all quick to call such kind of thinking "too radical" or indeed "utopian" almost as if calling someone "utopian" were an act of insult.

A friend once convinced me that while imagination and utopian thinking might lead to change, they are not the work of change themselves. In many ways, this is similar to the distinction made by Bloch between "abstract" and "concrete" utopias (Moir, 2018, p. 209). Bloch argued that it is concrete utopia which fulfils the essential utopian function of simultaneously anticipating and effecting the future. On the other hand, abstract utopia, while better than pessimism or indifference, has the tendency to become "lost in fantasy" rather than being "oriented to real

---

2   I thank the anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this "contemporary internality" of ruin as it is evoked in this paper.

3   The word "ruin-machine" comes from the paper workshop where Prof. Majumder asked if utopia was a ruin-machine. I would argue that capital (which could be read as a particular utopian vision in the Mannheimian sense) is the ruin-machine and utopia as method is that which refuses to see ruin as mere destruction.

possibility." Thus, "while abstract utopia may express desire, only concrete utopia carries hope" (Levitas, 1990, pp. 14-15; see also Lockie, 2023a, p. 8). In this essay, I choose to side with desire and argue that the inculcation of desire—howsoever fragmentary, speculative, or abstract—is very much the work of change in and of itself. It is the "first revolution" (Storey, 2019, p. 7), whether or not it leads to "actual" political change is another question.

I wish to assert, using theory as one such field site for "speculative" thinking, that when we view utopia as the desire to desire, the question whether utopia is "abstract" or "concrete" becomes irrelevant. Desire, Spargo and Botting tell us, is "forever elusive" and "always … wanting" (Spargo & Botting, 1993, 379). It is a certain kind of madness that is marked by "the refusal to accept that living beyond the present is delusional" and the "the refusal to take at face value … claims that there is no alternative" (Levitas, 2013, 17). It is the refusal to see the world as either a runner in the liberal race toward an end goal of "progress" or as a never-ending rendition of exploitation and destruction. Utopia as the desire to desire is a coming to terms with, an embracing of, that carefully concealed part of ourselves which refuses to give up on this madness and delusion. It is to permit ourselves the freedom of limitless imagination, allowing us to be not only the archaeologists of capital's ruins but also the architects of utopian possibilities.

Theoretical Imagination as Utopian Practice
John Storey argues that one of the main functions of radical utopianism is to show that the ideological limits of the present are historically contingent. Radical utopianism does this by first, defamiliarizing what currently exists by dislodging its taken- for- grantedness, and then, making possible the production of desire by asking "why not?" (Storey, 2019, pp. xii, 1-2). I argue that this work—of exposing the limits of our current ideological arrangements and making strange the familiar—is the day job of critical theory. Much like bell hooks' formulation of theory as "liberatory practice" (hooks, 1991), I see the work of theoretical imagination as "utopian practice." By its very nature, theory never ceases to ask: why this, and why not something else? It investigates our world with a keen eye to its detail, traces, undertones, and latencies, out of which emerge not only descriptive accounts of the world as it is but also possible accounts of a world as it could be.

Storey further argues that there is no absolute reality; the "real" is socially constructed around a consensus that is generated using the tools of power. He gives the example of the shift from the geocentric to the heliocentric understanding of the solar system that took place because Galileo refused to accept the consensus of "reality" that existed at the time (Storey, 2019, p. 3). Karl Mannheim noted that utopia often arises as the wish-fantasy of a single individual, and only later becomes a political project (Mannheim, 1954, p. 186). At some point in my childhood, I was as fascinated by my physics textbook as I am with theory today. The reason, I realise now, is that both have the power to imagine things that are imperceptible to us in immediate reality. Both, at the moment of their inception, have no real "purpose"—even the technological applications of theoretical physics that come much later, if at all. Both rely, finally, on the ability of the individual human mind to engage in what Paul Ricoeur calls "a free play of possibilities in a state of uninvolvement" (Ricoeur, 1994, p. 123).

Theoretical imagination is fundamentally this exercise in "free play" (I think also of Derrida's thinking about "play" as a possible site of rupture and presence of desire amidst the dead body of writing; see the essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences" in Derrida, 2002). Drawing from Sartre, Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei notes that our capacity to "inwardly imagine in abstraction from our surroundings" allows us to exercise cognitive freedom (Gosetti-Ferencei, 2018, pp. 10-11, citing Sartre, 2004, p. 184). Theory which imagines other worlds is able to do so effectively only because unlike say a policy paper, it is not under the constant pressure to "make things work" in the "real world." Therefore, to say that theory is abstract, irreal, speculative or impractical is saying nothing at all; the "state of uninvolvement," "free play of possibilities," and "abstraction of surroundings" in which theory flourishes is its logical necessity, not idle luxury.

Yet, as Sartre points out, this freedom of imagination must be defined by "being-in-the-world." He argues that the concrete situation of consciousness should serve as the sole motivation for the imagination of the irreal (Sartre, 2004, p. 186). I would not deny this, for as we discussed previously, we simply cannot escape our situatedness in the world, our status as "always-already" subjects of ideology. What we can do, however, is use the real as a launching pad to take a flight of fantasy, howsoever momentarily, with the aid of the wings provided by tools such as those of theory. We can and must use our situatedness within the world to make sense of it, and yet harbour the courage to transcend it. This is the work of theoretical imagination—the simultaneous plugging in and out of the world to listen to its problems, challenges, and surprises at some times, and to engage in a free play of possibilities at others.

Richard Hall argues in The Hopeless University (2021) that the university has become an anti-human project devoid of hope or any socially useful purpose beside the reproduction of the logics of capital (Hall, 2021, p. 4). While I agree that there are many things terribly wrong with the neoliberal university, it continues to represent a site of immense possibility. Schools, universities, and other spaces of learning provide us with the "noise-cancelling headphones" that "consistently drown out the turbulent world outside its boundary walls" and teach us to read, think, argue, imagine, and write (Majumder, 2022). These spaces of thinking become sites, where in Toni Morrison's words, one can "speculate … a future where the poor are not yet, not quite, all dead; where the under-represented minorities are not quite all imprisoned" (Morrison, 2001, p. 278).

The classroom, as the field site of theory, produces an affect of expanse, awe, and wonder like none other (on the excitement produced by French theory, for example, see Jameson, 2024, 9-22). It is the ground zero, as it were, of utopian practice—where the seed of desire can be sown without expecting anything in return. There have been uncountable times when I've had shivers down my spine listening to the teacher speak—from Kabir's *dohas* and Shakespeare in middle school, to literature and theory in university. Theory has allowed me to build mazes in my head only to get lost in them, to experience the thrill of having understood a text only to realise that I had understood nothing at all, to feel that the "idealist" world I used to imagine in my childhood is indeed possible and worth fighting for. Theory has taught me—for the first time in my life—to desire, desire more, and desire differently. In so doing, it has allowed me, in Tom Moylan's words, to become utopian (Moylan 2021).

Living Utopia in the Everyday

But let us turn now, as promised, from the "ideative universe" of the classroom to the "harsh reality" of the everyday. How does one become utopian in the real world? Levitas argues that while utopia as archaeology sits easily with social theory as critique, utopia as ontology and architecture pose a greater challenge (Levitas, 2013, p. 197). Similarly, Patrícia Vieira argues that one of the reasons behind our current dystopian outlook is that while "late modern thinkers are quick to diagnose the ills of our time," they "seem incapable to determine possible forms of cure" (Vieira, 2022, pp. 27).

Indeed, there is an argument that utopia needn't be about alternative worlds always—utopia can be this-world, lived in a posture of defiance, resistance, and unreasonableness to the oppression of the Here and the Now (Tierney, 2022, p. 160; see also Friberg, 2022). For instance, Laurence Davis argues for a conception of "grounded utopia" which pays attention to possibilities for qualitatively better forms of living for ordinary people in the present. He contrasts it with what he calls "transcendent utopia" which outlines perfect visions for the future, and forms the basis for systems of domination ranging from capitalism, colonialism, to white supremacy (Davis, 2021, pp. 571-572).

While Davis is right in saying that visions of utopia should speak to ordinary people, he commits the fatal error of assuming that thinking at scale is "transcendent" while the stuff of ordinary folks is "grounded." Following the standard misreading of utopias as perfection which Sargent warns us against (Sargent, 2021, p. 457), Davis equates utopian thinking with authoritarianism. He does not consider for a moment the possibility that "ordinary" people too might harbour the desire to reach for the impossible.

This is where I find it useful to contrast Davis's notion of "grounded utopia" with Davina Cooper's formulation of the "everyday utopia." In her book entitled Everyday Utopias: The Conceptual Life of Promising Spaces (2014), Cooper provides us with an account of six "everyday utopian sites"—a community trading network, a feminist bathhouse, an open platform where strangers discuss and debate issues, a public nudist movement, a system of equality governance, and a democratic school where students and staff collaborate in governing (Cooper, 2014, p. 2). Much like Davis, Cooper argues for paying attention to the already ongoing "experiments in living" even if that entails the absorption of some conservative elements into utopian thinking (Cooper, 2014, pp. 223-225). The crucial difference, however, is that Cooper's "everyday utopias" are not not-radical. This is manifest through the sites she chooses—these are timescapes radically different from the timescapes of capital. In Cooper's words, "against the assumption that anything outside the 'normal' is impossible, everyday utopias reveal their possibility." In so doing, everyday utopias bring about newer forms of desire and subjectivity, by showing that there are always alternative ways of doing things (Cooper, 2014, pp. 3-5).

Fredric Jameson insists that any realisation of the utopian impulse in the present makes it susceptible to subsumption within the ideological arrangement of capital (Jameson, 2010, pp. 23-26). Disagreeing with Jameson, Tom Moylan argues that this view risks abandoning utopia's political potential for transformation in the Here and Now (Moylan, 2021, pp. 186-187). Like Cooper, Moylan takes the examples such as Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed to show that an intervention in everyday reality is not inconsistent with the production of radical consciousness

and action (Moylan, 2021, pp. 194-203). I would like to place my weight behind Cooper and Moylan. There is no need, I think, to draw a sharp difference between utopian imagination and political intervention. Moylan tells us that the "utopian vocation" is lived by each one of us in our everyday lives (Moylan, 2021, p. 39). The only difference is that while "ordinary people" negotiate ideology on a daily basis in complex ways, and "activists" fight against it through political action, "theoreticians" combine the luxury of their noise-cancelling headphones with the labour of their thought to investigate the limits of ideology, and in so doing, imagine ways to transcend it.

While we are most certainly constrained by our inability to "transcend" the ideological incarceration of this world in one sense, the power of imagination is precisely to recover traces of utopian possibilities amidst the ruins of this incarceration in order to learn to desire for another world. As Fatima Vieira explains, the possibilities imagined by "philosophical utopia" are not divorced from the reality of "political utopias." The real is simply the locus of thinking about possible futures (Vieira, 2017, p. 69). In other words, the imaginary has a very real connection with the real, theory and praxis are not polar opposites, and the route to the grounded is through the transcendent and vice-versa. While critical inquiry assumes the role of the archaeologist in Levitas's three-step process, everyday utopias and their conceptual imagination perform the work of utopia as ontology by being utopian. Together, they seek to construct, as architects of desire, other worlds beyond the horizons of the Here and Now. Cooper's everyday utopias teach us, unlike the this-worldliness of grounded or practical utopias, that "we must live in this world as citizens of another" (Levitas, 2013, p. 220).

Conclusion: Learning to Desire with the Ocean

Bloch begins The Principle of Hope with a set of metaphysical questions: "Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going?"—questions, which despite all our progress and advancements, refuse to leave us (Moir, 2018, p. 212). I read the inevitability of these questions as indicators of the endless capacity of the human mind to think, introspect, imagine, conjure expanse, and still remain unsatisfied. Contrary to arguments that we need places or times of alterity—an "Elsewhere"—to imagine utopia (see, for example, Brossard, 2019), I have argued in this paper that being the owner of our imaginative faculties, we can choose to exercise them anywhere, anytime.

Yet, sometimes, we need a cue, from nature or otherwise, to remind us that we possess this capacity. While I was thinking about and writing this paper, I happened to visit a beach after many years. As I stood at the shore looking at the crashing waves and the disappearing horizon, I wondered what the sea would look, feel, sound like, far away from the shore, beyond the horizon. Vincent Crapanzano argues that horizons "mark a change in ontological register"; they postulate a "beyond" which offers unknown possibilities, triggers licit and illicit desires, and provokes dread, uncertainty, and exaltation of the unknown. He asks why we are unable to take pleasure in the irreality, the possibility, and the play of imaginative horizons (Crapanzano, 2004, pp. 14-17).

Standing at the shore, I couldn't possibly fathom in my small head the largeness of the ocean, however hard I tried—the "beyond" was unreachable to me. Yet, there was a peculiar pleasure to be had in the purposeless play that the horizon engendered in my mind. What struck me was that the

ocean allowed me to have that thought in the first place—it forced me to try to imagine and desire, even if unsuccessfully, an "elsewhere." The beach became a metaphor for this paper—even as I stood on the ideological limits of the shore, surrounded by the detritus left by tourists, I knew looking at the vast ocean that utopia was right here. All we needed to do was dare to desire.

Author. 7 September 2023. Miramar Beach, Goa, India.

References

- Althusser, L. (2014). *On the reproduction of capitalism: Ideology and ideological state apparatuses* (G. M. Goshgarian, Trans.). Verso.
- Althusser, L. (2017). *Philosophy for non-philosophers* (G. M. Goshgarian, Trans.). Bloomsbury.
- Bear, L. (2017). Anthropological futures: For a critical political economy of capitalist time. *Social Anthropology, 25*(2), 142-158.
- Brossard, B. (2019). Elements for a theory of utopia production. *Utopian Studies, 30*(3), 422-443.
- Cooper, D. (2014). *Everyday utopias: The conceptual life of promising spaces*. Duke University Press.
- Crapanzano, V. (2004). *Imaginative horizons: An essay in literary-philosophical anthropology*. University of Chicago Press.
- Davis, L. (2021). Grounded utopia. *Utopian Studies, 32*(3), 552-581.
- Derrida, J. (2002). Writing and Difference (A. Bass, Trans.). Routledge.
- Eagleton, T. (1991). *Ideology: An introduction*. Verso.
- Friberg, A. (2022). Disrupting the present and opening the future: Extinction Rebellion, Fridays For Future, and the disruptive utopian method. *Utopian Studies, 33*(1), 1-17.
- Gosetti-Ferencei, J. A. (2018). *The life of imagination: Revealing and making the world*. Columbia University Press.
- Hall, R. (2021). *The hopeless university: Intellectual work at the end of the end of history*. Mayfly Books.
- hooks, b. (1991). Theory as liberatory practice. *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism, 4*(1), 1.
- Irr, C. (2017). Introduction: An Althusser for the twenty-first century. *Meditations, 30*(2), 29-36.
- Jameson, F. (2005). *Archaeologies of the future: The desire called utopia and other science fictions*. Verso.
- Jameson, F. (2008). *The ideologies of theory*. Verso.
- Jameson, F. (2010). Utopia as method, or the uses of the future. In M. D. Gordin, H. Tilley, & G. Prakash (Eds.), *Utopia/dystopia: Conditions of historical possibility* (pp. 21-44). Princeton University Press.
- Jameson, F. (2024). The years of theory: Postwar French thought to the present. Verso.
- Kellner, D. (2012). Ernst Bloch, utopia, and ideology critique. In P. Vieira & M. Marder (Eds.), *Existential utopia: New perspectives on utopian thought* (pp. 83-96). Continuum.
- Lesjak, C. (2017). Althusser and the university today. *Meditations, 30*(2), 51-56.
- Levitas, R. (1990). Educated hope: Ernst Bloch on abstract and concrete utopia. *Utopian Studies, 1*(2), 13-26.
- Levitas, R. (2013). *Utopia as method: The imaginary reconstitution of society*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Li, P. (2017). Althusser's clinamen: Aleatory materialism and revolutionary politics. *Meditations, 30*(2), 57-62.
- Lockie, G. (2023a). *Resources for hope: Rediscovering the post-capitalist horizon* (Doctoral

dissertation). Victoria University of Wellington.

- Lockie, G. (2023b, August 2). Beautiful detritus. *Thesis Eleven*. https://thesiseleven.com/2023/08/02/article-beautiful-detritus/

- Majumder, A. (2022, October 23). On decolonization: Scattered speculations on the Indian university. *Lokniti*. https://mpp.nls.ac.in/blog/on-decolonization-scattered-speculations-on-the-indian-university/

- Mannheim, K. (1954). *Ideology and utopia: An introduction to sociology of knowledge* (L. Wirth & E. Shils, Trans.). Hardcourt, Brace and Co.

- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (2010). Manifesto of the communist party. Marx/Engels Internet Archive (S. Moore, Trans.). https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf

- Moir, C. (2018). Ernst Bloch: The principle of hope. In B. Best, W. Bonefeld, & C. O'Kane (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of Frankfurt school critical theory* (pp. 199-215). Sage.

- Morrison, T. (2001). How can values be taught in the university? *Michigan Quarterly Review, 40*(2), 273-278.

- Moylan, T. (2021). *Becoming utopian: The culture and politics of radical transformation*. Bloomsbury.

- Novak, M. (2022). Conceptions of utopia in modern liberal thought: Is there a liberal utopia? *Utopian Studies, 33*(1), 144-160.

- Ricoeur, P. (1976). Ideology and utopia as cultural imagination. *Philosophic Exchange, 7*(1), 17-28.

- Ricoeur, P. (1986). *Lectures on ideology and utopia*. Columbia University Press.

- Ricoeur, P. (2016). Imagination in discourse and in action. In G. Robinson & J. Rundell (Eds.), *Rethinking imagination: Culture and creativity* (pp. 118-135). Routledge.

- Sargent, L. T. (2008). Ideology and utopia: Karl Mannheim and Paul Ricoeur. *Journal of Political Ideologies, 13*(3), 263-273.

- Sargent, L. T. (2021). Utopia matters! The importance of utopianism and utopian scholarship. *Utopian Studies, 32*(3), 453-477.

- Sartre, J.-P. (2004). *The imaginary* (J. Webber, Trans.). Routledge.

- Shklar, J. (2020). After utopia: The decline of political faith. Princeton University Press.

- Spargo, T., & Botting, F. (1993). Re-iterating desire. Textual Practice, 7(3), 379-383.

- Storey, J. (2019). *Radical utopianism and cultural studies: On refusing to be realistic*. Routledge.

- Szeman, I. (2017). On ideology in Althusser's On the reproduction of capitalism. *Meditations, 30*(2), 83-88.

- Tierney, M. (2022). The twenty-first century. In P. Marks, J. A. Wagner-Lawlor, & F. Vieira (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of utopian and dystopian literatures* (pp. 149-164). Palgrave Macmillan.

- Tsing, A. L. (2015). The mushroom at the end of the world: On the possibility of life in capitalist ruins. Princeton University Press.

- Vieira, F. (2017). From the political utopia to the philosophical utopia—and rescuing the

political utopia, on second thought. In Z. Czigányik (Ed.), *Utopian horizons: Ideology, politics, literature* (pp. 63-75). Central University Press.

- Vieira, P. (2022). Utopia. In P. Marks, J. A. Wagner-Lawlor, & F. Vieira (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of utopian and dystopian literatures* (pp. 25-38). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wegner, P. E. (2017). On Althusser's not un-usefulness (Notes toward an investigation). *Meditations, 30*(2), 89-98.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

URC'24 STUDENT VOLUNTEERS

Jahanavi Ahuja
Ayushi Gupta
Niharika Khera
Pragnya Reddy
Dyotona Ray
Gauravi Dixit
Tarini Kohli
Samiksha Modi
Sakshi Bansal
Manan Singh
Anushka Godhwani
Gungun Jain
Karthik Saji
Muskan Agarwal
Ana Mehrish
Arjun Jaiswal
Maahi Jha
Vipassana Buduguntae
Muskan Hossain
Avanti Savur
Asmita
Jayana Roy
Mehak Jolly
Kaarthik Garimella
Swathi Anand
Naman Jain

Avivan Vaerkar
Michelle Sharma
Saniya Sachdeva
Varsha Bishnoi
Padhvi Sadhu
Manveer Chhabra
Aarzoo Kumar
Mehak Bethala
Shaurya Agarwal
Vanya Yadav
Manandeep Singh
Ananya Goyal
Aryan Taneja
Krisha Rastogi
Gunjan Goenka
Nandita Sharma
Rishita Kohli
Joanne Wilson
Sachkeerat Chawla
Shubhangi Ahuja
Soumya Sahrawat
Anisha Anand
Nishtha Rupareliya
Bhoomi Wadhwani
Khushi Singh
Sneha Jain

Divisha Maheshwari
Vrinda Bhatnagar
Suhasini Pande
Gopika K Nair
Rishita Oswal
Vidhi Khadaria
Vidhi kubadia
Vrnda Goel
Anshika Jain
Ishita Gupta
Adarsh Suresh
Ananya Sampath
Jivya Kapoor
Paakhi Siddharth
Anjjali Shrivastav
Vaishali Kumar
Keyaa Hiremath
Koral Kothari
Peehu Bhardwaj
Siya Vaid
Kyra Singh
Khushi Sengupta
Vanshika Agrawal
Ananya Radhakrishna
Kasak Chaudhary

FACULTY COORDINATORS URC'24

FACULTY CO-CONVENORS
PROF. GARGI BHARADWAJ
PROF. PRIYA RANJAN

PUBLICITY
PROF. RUKMINI PANDE
PROF. ALIYA NAZ

COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH
PROF. ASHWIN VERGHESE
PROF. SAKSHI CHANDALIYA

POSTER SESSIONS
PROF. SRIROOP CHAUDHARI
PROF. APARNA VYAS

URC ABSTRACT AND PANELLING COMMITTEE'S
PROF. SRITI GANGULY,
PROF. ABHIJIT BANNERJEE
PROF. POULOMI DAS

EDUCATOR'S PANEL
PROF. POULOMI DAS

BFA OPEN STUDIO
PROF. PAYAL ARYA
PROF. PRIYESH GOTHWAL

TRANSPORT & SECURITY
PROF. ARUN KAUSHIK
PROF. VIKASH VAIBHAV
PROF. ACHIA ANZI

VENUE & CLASSROOM BOOKING
PROF. SATYAKI KANJILAL

IT (AUDIO/VIDEO)
PROF.SIDDHI GYAN PANDEY
PROF. ANGELA JOSPEH

REGISTRATION DESK
PROF. ZAHEER ABBAS

FOOD & ACCOMODATION
PROF. SAAGAR TIWARI
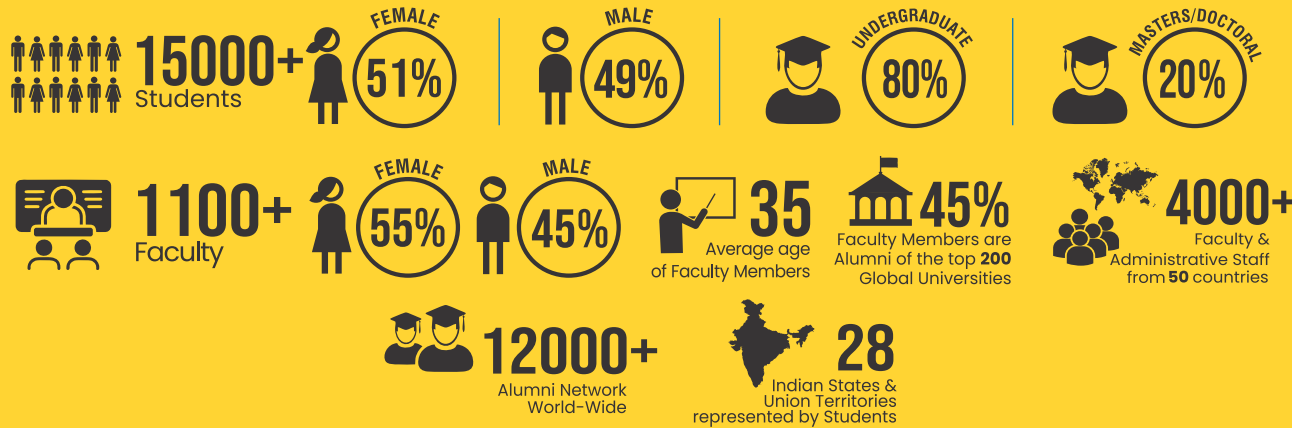
STUDENT VOLUNTEERS
PROF. YASODHARA RAKSHIT

2
DAYS

+25
PANELS

+85
STUDENT
PRESENTATIONS

+115
UNDERGRADUATE
RESEARCHERS

#URC24

www.jgu.edu.in

JGU *at a* GLANCE

15000+ Students

FEMALE **51%**
MALE **49%**
UNDERGRADUATE **80%**
MASTERS/DOCTORAL **20%**

1100+ Faculty

FEMALE **55%**
MALE **45%**

35 Average age of Faculty Members

45% Faculty Members are Alumni of the top **200** Global Universities

4000+ Faculty & Administrative Staff from **50** countries

12000+ Alumni Network World-Wide

28 Indian States & Union Territories represented by Students

12 SCHOOLS

45+ Programmes

- 30+ Undergraduate Programmes
- 15+ Postgraduate Programmes
- Doctoral Programme

Jindal Global Law School
India's First Global Law School

JINDAL GLOBAL BUSINESS SCHOOL
INDIA'S FIRST MULTI-DISCIPLINARY GLOBAL BUSINESS SCHOOL

Jindal School of International Affairs
India's First Global Policy School

Jindal School of Government and Public Policy
India's First Public Policy School

Jindal School of Liberal Arts & Humanities
India's First Transnational Humanities School

Jindal School of Journalism & Communication
India's First Global Media School

JINDAL SCHOOL OF ART & ARCHITECTURE
India's First Interdisciplinary School of Built Environment

JINDAL SCHOOL OF BANKING & FINANCE
India's First Global Finance School

JINDAL SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY
India's First Interdisciplinary Environment & Sustainability School

Jindal School of Psychology & Counselling
India's First Transdisciplinary Psychology School

JINDAL SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES & LITERATURE
India's Global School of Language & Literature Studies

JINDAL SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
India's First Interdisciplinary School for Public Health & Development

RESEARCH

7900+ Publications

60+ Interdisciplinary research centres

5 Research & capacity building institutes

- **JILDEE** JINDAL INSTITUTE OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND EXECUTIVE EDUCATION
- **JINDAL INSTITUTE OF BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES**
- **INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH & CAPACITY BUILDING** O.P. JINDAL GLOBAL UNIVERSITY
- **Jindal India Institute** PROPELLING THE INDIAN CENTURY O.P. JINDAL GLOBAL UNIVERSITY
- **JINDAL INSTITUTE OF HARYANA STUDIES**

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS

525+ Collaborations with International Universities & Higher Education Institutions

10 Forms of Global Partnerships

80+ Countries & Regions

200+ Faculty & Student Exchange Collaborations

75+ Countries represented by Students

RANKINGS & RECOGNITIONS

RANKED **NO.1** IN INDIA
LAW & LEGAL STUDIES

RANKED **NO.1** PRIVATE UNIVERSITY IN INDIA
ARTS & HUMANITIES

RANKED **NO.1** PRIVATE UNIVERSITY IN INDIA
POLITICS & INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

QS WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS BY SUBJECT 2025

RANKED **NO.1** IN THE WORLD
TIMES HIGHER EDUCATION ONLINE LEARNING RANKINGS 2024

RANKED AMONG TOP **101-200** SDG 12 & 16 GLOBALLY
TIMES HIGHER EDUCATION IMPACT RANKINGS 2024

THE Times Higher Education

CONFERRED THE STATUS OF AN
INSTITUTION OF EMINENCE
BY THE
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

O.P. JINDAL GLOBAL
INSTITUTION OF EMINENCE DEEMED TO BE **UNIVERSITY**
A Private University Promoting Public Service

www.jgu.edu.in

Sonipat-131001, (NCR of Delhi)

JGU - An Initiative of Jindal Steel & Power Foundation