

BoT

A SOUTH ASIAN SPECIAL.

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Volume 32

A NEW REALITY

LET'S TALK ABOUT WHAT REALLY MATTERS.

FROM THE EDITOR

"BOL"- I used to hate the word. It is the way most Mumbai-ites answer their phone, seemingly instructing you to sputter out what you want as if their time was too precious to waste on you. It was rude, it was degrading, and honestly, it was bitchy. Yet the word itself simply means talk and talking to me has never been a bad thing. Talking means communicating; it means discussion, debate, brainstorming, and overall changing the world for better or for worse. Words are more powerful than one thinks, and that old saying of "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" is complete and utter shit. Words and talking are how we express ourselves how we showcase our ideas and how we continue to innovate and bring awareness. So when we started to put this issue together, I wondered how I can make this word that I have always hated- a positive in my head. And it clicked.

It seems simple, but this issue is about talking, and I don't mean surface level "hi aunty, hi uncle qesai ho" I mean really talking about our experiences, about our problems about the things that are changing for us as South Asians. It is about speaking to what really matters and whether that's a fun story about Amrata Singh's secret vault of treasures (page...) or a serious look at how rape cases are spurring a women's empowerment movement (page....) its about having those meaningful discussions that make us better human beings.

So in a not so surprising turn of events, I no longer hate the word. In fact, I challenge you to ready set bol...



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BOL



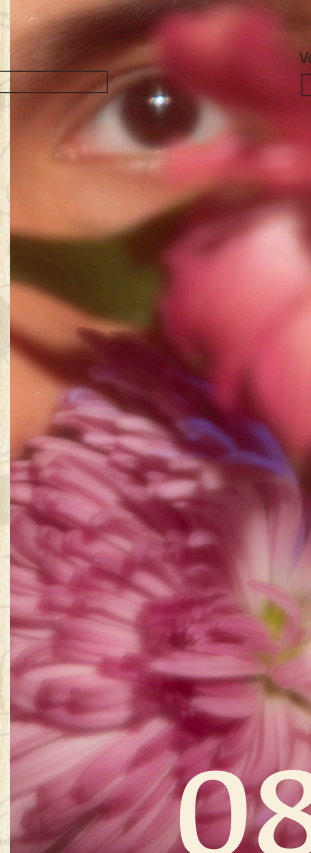
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THE SCRAP. THE STORY.

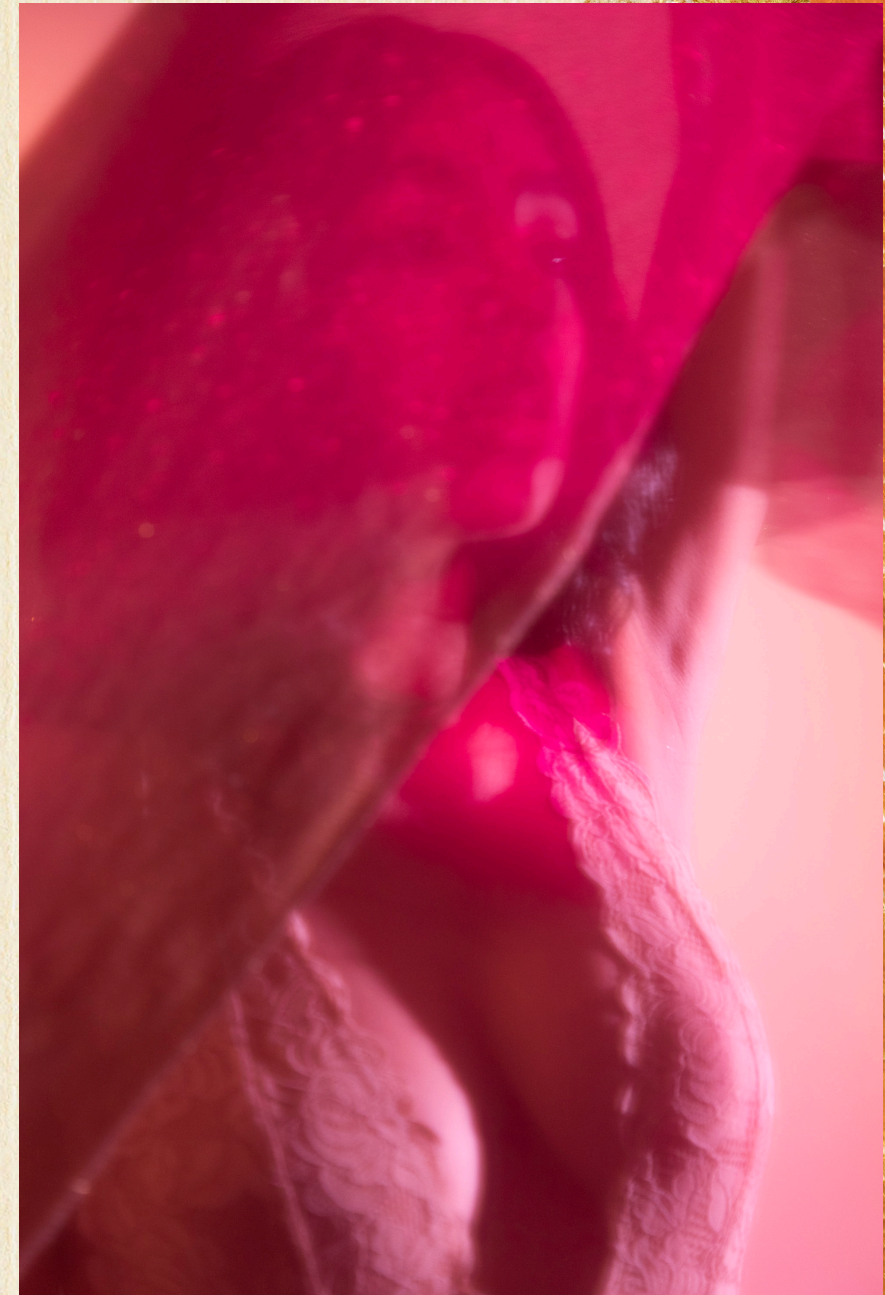
In a world where every second, the equivalent of one garbage truck of textiles is landfilled or burned, Indians are changing their attitudes and focusing on giving new life to fashion waste.

By Alyssa Advano

Sustainability- the world's hottest topic of conversation. In recent months it seems like every time you open a fashion magazine or even simply flip through the morning newspaper, there is a new article or a new brand that is promoting the concept. Yet what does sustainable fashion actually mean? Surprisingly, there's no oxford definition, but in essence, sustainability is partially about producing fashion goods in an environmentally, ethically, and socio-economical manner, but also about individuals and their behaviors regarding sustainable fashion consumption and use.

In the past, in upper-class Indian society, wearing the same outfit twice was the equivalent of a cardinal sin. Growing up I would only wear outfits once and because my circle of friends had seen "my look" already, it would be blasphemous to repeat. This was especially prominent during wedding season when each event required an entirely new outfit, costing upwards of \$400 and never worn for more than 4 hours before being put back up on a shelf in the plastic casing. A few years later, when it was acceptable to repeat the outfit again, with a completely different set of individuals, I may dust off said plastic case and consider wearing it again (assuming it still fit and was not outdated.) Yet today, Indians see the complete and utter waste that's created by that attitude.

In 2018 the UN environment program discovered that the fashion industry produces 20% of global wastewater and 10% of global emissions, which is more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined. The textile dyeing industry comes in second place as the biggest polluter of water - which isn't surprising, considering that it takes approximately 2000 gallons of water to make a pair of jeans. This attitude of constantly needing new fashion is destroying the planet we live and breathe on. We are promoting the overconsumption of fashion goods to sustain our constant desire to stay on trend. Yet I'm sure you've heard that fashion consumption is a major issue before, and that's why the Indian mindset is changing. Not only are fashion designers like Vaishali S and Rajshekhar Virupaxappa producing beautiful, sustainable collections, but the average Indian individual has also begun to take matters into their own hands. In this era of DIY, Indians are using old scraps of fabric leftover from stitching their one of a kind saris and kurtis and using them to create new and beautiful items. From headbands to pillows, to tube tops, to accents on socks, to coronavirus face mask - these scraps of fabric are being given new life instead of being added to the pile of waste that is destined to find itself in a landfill.



Personally, I believe this act of reusing isn't just about being more sustainable but is about holding on to the memories of a different time. Each of these new items is comprised of scraps from an outfit that either you or a loved one once wore; thus more than most likely it is connected to a memory. Those scraps of fabric add on to a story that you are creating a continuation of, and I think that whether we realize it or not is partially why this trend emerged. Indians tend to love stories – we love romance and glamour, but especially sentiment, hence why Bollywood movies are an emotional rollercoaster. So yes, this trend of making the old new is about making the world a more sustainable place but is also about continuing the stories that these fabrics once told.





It is our responsibility as consumers to understand that our level of consumption has to decrease, and the only way this is going to happen is when we start to rethink how we look at clothes and fabric. When we used to look at scraps of hand-embroidered chiffon or a chunk of crushed velvet, it was easy just to throw away, but now these leftovers are seen as something that can be used and become new products that we cherish. India, as a society is not only learning to be less wasteful but is also extending the story of textiles in the process.



MARIA
QAMAR

FEMINIST DESI POP ART

"I WAS BULLIED A LOT — FOR BEING BROWN AND SIMILAR THINGS — AND I DEALT WITH IT BY DRAWING WHAT HAPPENED IN LITTLE COMIC PANELS."



THE PRINCESS AND THE VAULT

By Alyssa Advano

Amrita Rana Singh is the granddaughter of Maharaja Judha Shum Shere Jung Bahadur Rana, a previous Prime Minister of Nepal, making her part of the Ruling Family. Now a successful jewelry designer in Mumbai, India, Amrita, gives Alyssa Advano an insight into her heritage and the life she has lead beyond her grandfather's era of royalty.

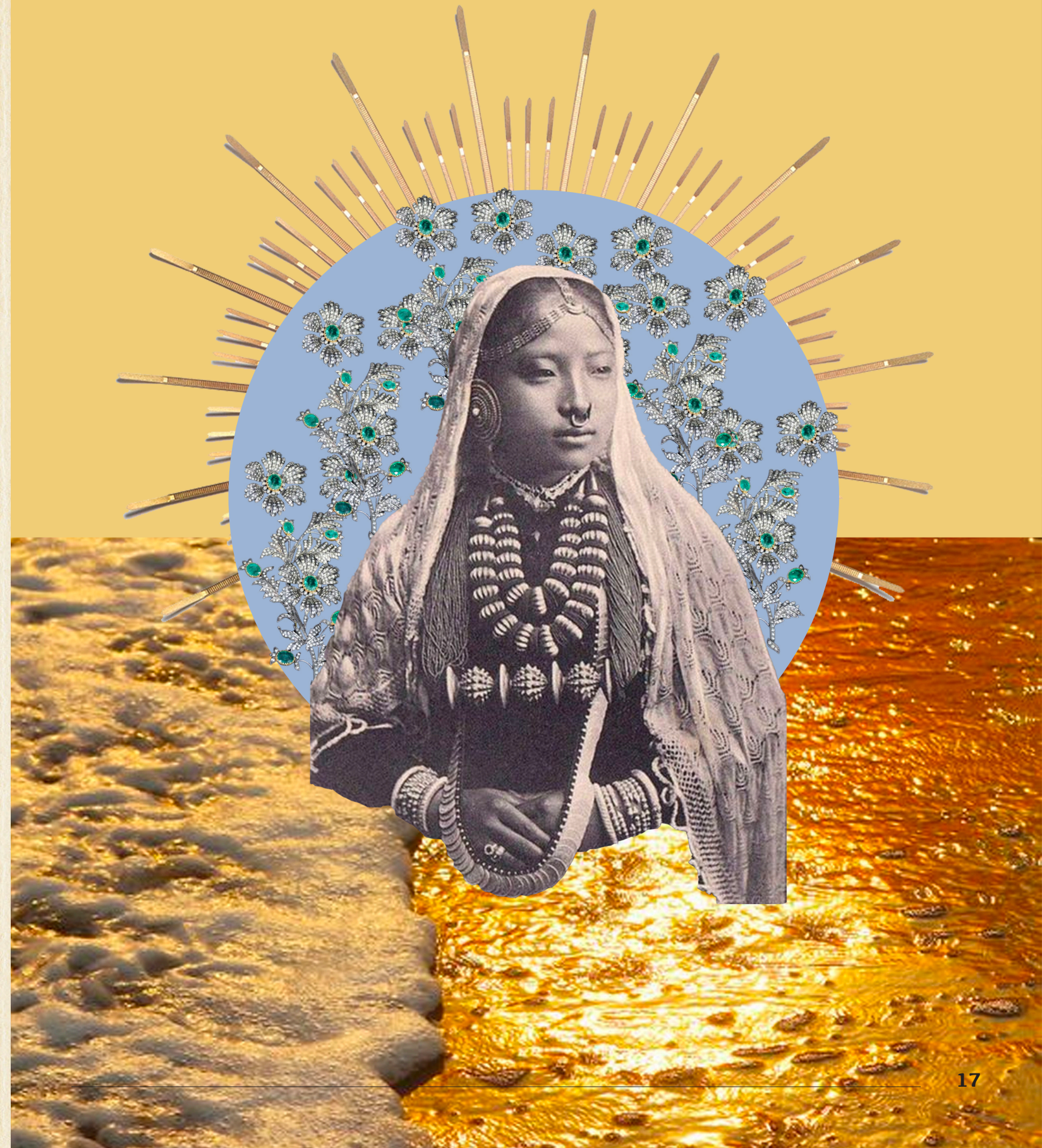
Ever since I was little, Aunt Amrita was jokingly called the "Princess," she was this grandiose woman that could command a room with a single word. Her presence would simultaneously revert you into an obedient child and make you feel as if you could bear the weight of the world on your shoulders. She was always wearing jewelry of her own creation, dark silvers, and stones delicately crafted into floral shapes that could only be described as fit for a queen. And then there was the vault. My mother used to tell me stories of Aunt Amrita's secret vault filled with jewelry, textiles, and treasures galore; it was a place no person could enter unless deemed worthy, and I certainly would never reach that status. For years I begged and begged for a glimpse of this eternally unreachable place, and it wasn't until I conducted this interview, 17 years later that I realized it had all been a lie.



In typical Indian fashion, Amrita's kajal lined eyes appear on my screen over two hours after our scheduled Facetime interview. Her voice booms over my speakers, exclaiming that today she was "really stuck badly"- an excuse I have heard countless times before. Yet, even in her somewhat frazzled state after a long day sitting in Mumbai's standstill traffic, her light brown highlighted hair is blown out and pinned back with a crocodile clip that perfectly matches her fitted blouse. Around her shoulders is a rhinestone encrusted silk pashmina that wouldn't dare to move from its effortless drape - after all, it is in the presence of a member of the ruling family of Nepal.



Growing up, Aunt Amrita was always this elusive character, as my aunts best friend, a frequent member of our family gatherings, a successful jewellery designer, and now a stage 4 cancer survivor, she would stride into the living room and throw down her favourite Louis Vuitton on the couch. She would then proceed to greet everyone with two exaggerated kisses on each cheek, sprawl her body on a large lounge chair, and impatiently wait to be served her first drink. After a glass of wine was securely placed in her hand, she would begin to speak, and this 5ft 4" woman would astound even the most senior intellects with her in-depth knowledge of everything from politics to fashion. The conversation would thrive as she had this way of making all the individuals in the room feel heard- even convincing my very introverted little brother to speak up in a room full of very opinionated often slightly intoxicated military men about the issue of gun violence.





Her smile grows, and her face begins to relax as I reassure her that her delay had not affected me negatively in the slightest. She immediately began to explain how her grandfather was the Prime Minister of Nepal for 14 years, serving under the King's family, the Shahs. "To be honest, I was not born in the era of my grandfather's rule; when I was born, he had already passed away, so my parents brought me up in the new generation." She went on to explain how her parents were very forward-thinking; in fact, she was part of the first generation of women in her family who were allowed to be educated. Thus in 1952, when the family moved from Nepal to India and were gifted a plot of land by the Indian independence activist and first Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, her father created an education trust and built a school. "My father was different, despite coming from a family that had so much he wanted to give back to the people," she said.

Today, Amrita has very little connection to the politics in Nepal "The basic link is not there, my brothers and I are not in the politics of Nepal, which my father was. We are all liberals; we believe in democracy." Her back begins to straighten, and her lips purse, not as a defense mechanism but with a sense of pride, "My grandfather and grandmother

lived in a very different era, they wouldn't understand us, we are not the kind of children they would've wanted us to be. Their era was very different, it was all about the ruling, and the women were all under 'purdah.' We broke those shackles," she says.

Amrita goes on to exclaim she does not think her grandparents would be happy about how she chooses to live now, "We live like common people- that's how the world works. I don't think they could live like us, but I don't think I could live like them. But of course, we inherited a lot."

This is the moment, this is when I'm going to finally hear about what exactly is in this vault that I'd been dreaming about for as long as I can remember, and maybe just maybe she would offer to let me take a look inside.

"I've inherited textiles, my mother's entire watch collection, jewelry from that era. I display them all in my home; I've even got two frames and a cigarette box that was given to my grandfather by Lord Mount Batten. I don't hide any of these things; people should see it because history is not supposed to be hidden; it's supposed to be shown so the next generation can understand and take it forward," she said.

You could almost hear my jaw drop, this vault had never existed, the priceless artifacts had been all around me, and I had never even noticed. My mind is overwhelmed, and as she leans under a marble table trying, unsuccessfully, to flip her camera in an attempt to show me the crest of Britain's former King, I am jolted back to the present by the distinct sound of her laugh. "I am now a jewelry designer, I wasn't trained, but it just came naturally to me, so now my way of giving back and maintaining my heritage is to craft jewelry. I craft pieces from the era of my grandparents, the art deco era. I'm reviving that style and crafting out of silver, not gold, as that's how it was done then."

Still laughing, exposing the crow's feet of a woman who's thoroughly enjoyed her life, she promptly sits down, signaling that our conversation is over but does not hang up before leaving me with one last thought. "So yes, we have inherited a lot, but it's not about money, some things are priceless, and so more than anything we inherited the idea of looking beyond, we can't be in that era for all our lives- that was then, this is now."



*Purdah Definition: The practice among women in certain Muslim and Hindu societies of living in a separate room or behind a curtain, or of dressing in all-enveloping clothes, in order to stay out of the sight of men or strangers.

"My struggle is my message to the people"

-Irom Chanu Sharmila, 'Iron Lady of Manipur'



"My work constantly traverses the lines between Metaphor, Reality and Illusion and ranges from plays on space-time theories to cultural, historic and physical critiques of place, done in paintings, interactive installations, sculpture, video and performance."



EXHALE

By Alyssa Advano

Palak Shah is an up and coming athleisure designer in Mumbai India who has combined her love of design with her background in psychology to create a mental health-conscious clothing brand. A woman to be watched, she is known by her family and friends to be an incredibly driven individual who is hands-on in every aspect of her business, from spending hours in factories during manufacturing to hand packaging each of her orders. In recent months she not only married the love of her life but has worked hard to become a favorite amongst Bollywood celebrities such as Kriti Sanon and Erika Packard. In between her busy schedule, Palak Sat down with BOL to talk about Exhale.

Alyssa Advano: Let's start off simple; what is your background in?

Palak Shah: Well, I studied Psychology in International Baccalaureate at Jamnabai Narsee School, and I have an Apparel Manufacture and Design Diploma from SNDT University and an AAS degree in Fashion Design from Parsons. However, I've always been around creativity and design as my mother is a Fashion Designer, too – so design has always been in my blood.

AA: That's awesome that you have that family guidance around. So, what made you actually want to start to exhale label?

PS: I started Exhale Label to combine my two strengths - the ability to connect with people and the education in design that I had acquired from internships. I really wanted to start a conversation about mental health in India, so I became the first person in the country that created clothing related to human emotion. I took my wish of creating this niche

product and created clothes that empower them to take care of their mental health.

AA: That's incredible that you're so in tune with your client's emotions and their mental concerns. What do you think is the biggest concern with mental health and South Asians today?

PS: My business, in particular, is based in India, and here mental health has always been shoved to the backseat due to the beliefs in our society. People would feel all kinds of things, whether that be anxiety, depression, etc. but it was important never to show their feelings in public as it's considered being vulnerable- and being vulnerable is never considered to be a good thing. Society cares more about how one is being perceived than what a person is actually going through; for example, a divorce is now after so many years not a taboo subject, but people still are quick to criticize instead of thinking about what you must have gone through. But times are finally changing and thanks to the new generation, going to therapy is getting more normal, speaking about your mental health problems is slightly more casual - so we are moving forward.

AA: It feels like you are really in tune with your clients and their lives- why do you think it's so important to share their stories?

PS: In my experience, sharing stories has been a great way for people to get a lot of their emotions out, which in turn helps to normalize mental health problems. The fact is, everyone goes through something or the other. So to put your story out there not just



empowers the storyteller but also reassures readers that they are not alone!

That's why I created #exhalewarriors- a platform for individuals to tell their stories.

And it's so heartwarming when they come back with such positive

feedback. They

have people messaging them with affirmative, positive messages,

and some have

even had people

apologizing for

their past behavior.

In a strange way

telling their stories

ended up giving a

lot of my warriors

the closure they always

wanted. Personally, I

have always been an

open book, and I always

encourage others to do

the same. Ultimately,

#exhalewarriors is my

way of getting people

to open up.

AA: With you

showcasing so many

stories of individuals,

it must sometimes

get difficult as you

are talking about very

personal subjects,

have you ever gotten

a negative response to

exhale label?

PS: I feel truly blessed

to say this, but to

date, nobody has ever

criticized the work I do

or given me any negative feedback.

Alyssa Advano: That's amazing, moving on

the actual clothing, what do you keep in

mind when designing?

PS: At the end of the day, Exhale is a business, so I have to keep in mind who my target market is and what they are looking for. Along with the needs of my target audience, I also try to track the latest trends internationally. I always try to keep fashion moving forward to have the next best thing ready for my clients.

We are a fast-growing brand for a startup but still an ethical one. We do taglines to denote emotion, so we try to keep the storylines aligned with our subject of inspiration as well as try to keep in mind what emotions and taglines would be relatable to a diverse audience.

AA: Speaking of a diverse audience, to wrap things up, why do you think there is this perspective that most brands still aren't as inclusive in India?

PS: I think that a few years ago it that yes that used to be the case but the number of brands that have come up in the past two years has absolutely changed how clothes are looked at. India is a progressive country, and the change is happening NOW. People are

starting to understand the importance of inclusivity. Everything from magazine covers, social media, fashion brands, and even cinema have had a major shift in their thought process and working towards making India more inclusive.

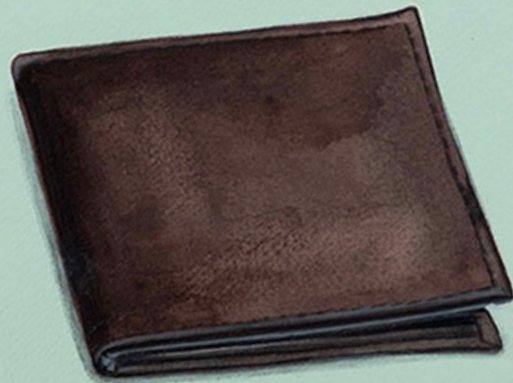


"Self acceptance has not been a breeze. Everybody goes through something in their life. For me it was skin, for some it is their hair/ weight or it could be anything else. Everybody has problems. At the end it is all about the process. You are going to hate yourself on some days and love yourself on some. Your feelings are never going to be constant. You can only try and be as positive as you can be and be the best version of yourself." - Self Love Club
#exhalewarrior

"My first instance was when I was 13, I was on a holiday and I had ordered breakfast, it was pancakes and hot chocolate, and my aunt looked at me and said "if you keep eating like this, you'll be twice your size by January". That holiday I stopped eating." - Kindess
#exhalewarrior

"My emotions felt like a burden, and I started to hold myself back to fit in better. I clearly remember how stifling that felt. Even well-meaning friends reinforced this notion, often responding to my emotional outbursts with a "chill out, don't be crazy". I didn't know how to tell people that I wasn't "crazy", I just felt my emotions at a much higher intensity." - I promise you're enough!
#exhalewarrior

Property of:
Prajakta Potnis



"Potnis's work turns the body under capitalism inside out, looking for the traces it carries within."



NOT YOUR AVERAGE *bride* (s)

By Alyssa Advano

As the world begins to change and the south eastern culture starts to become more accepting of different lifestyles, Indian wedding wear is starting to adapt to the needs of the Lesbian Bride. Sleek silhouettes in lavish fabrics that arent traditionally feminine are in high demand but is India ready to adapt its traditions?

Weddings- A time in which two individuals and their families come together to unite in a bond between two people. Where individuals agree to consider each other's needs, dreams, and desires to create a connection that is often celebrated with a grandiose party, it's said to be a day (or in a Indian's case a week) that little girls dream of. Yet for some little girls, the connection they find in another human being is just the beginning.

The Catalyst

In 2018 India made its first step towards equality of LGBTQ+ individuals by rescinding section 377 of the penal code – a colonial-era law that criminalizes consensual sexual acts between same-sex individuals. **“History owes an apology to the members of this community and their families ... for the ignominy and ostracism that they have suffered through the centuries. The members of this community were compelled to live a life full of fear of reprisal and persecution,”** said Justice Indu Malhotra of India’s Supreme court as he finally deemed the law unconstitutional.

LOVE HAS NO
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Outsourcing

Although India is said to be far from legalizing same-sex marriage, this was a huge step in allowing the public of India to begin to try and accept those of this previously taboo community. It has set a precedence for individuals to come out to the public about who they are and express themselves in any which way they desire. Yet it has also spurred an influx of LGBTQ+ couples going public about their relationship and thus choosing to get married as their relationships progress. Usually, this means having a destination wedding in a place where LGBTQ+ marriage is legal, including the US and the UK. Once the location, guests, and flowers are organized, many outfits must be bought in order to showcase the couple as their best selves. Yet what should be an enjoyable experience with family and friends ‘OOING’ and ‘AAING’ over the fit and cut of beautifully crafted outfits is often a disappointing excursion for women of the LGBTQ+ community.



The New Feminine

Indian bridal wear is typically designed for straight feminine women. It is often heavily embroidered, weighs more than 30kg, and showcases a woman's midriff, chest, and back. Although these pieces are beautiful in their own right- they are not everyone's cup of tea. Since the influx of LGBTQ+ Indian weddings there has been an increase in women who are looking for more simple garments that are lightweight, beautifully tailored but not traditionally feminine. Often these women decide to wear a version of men's attire if they want to forgo the skirts and ruffles entirely. Yet there are women out there that do not necessarily want to look entirely feminine or altogether masculine, and few designers are reaching



Recently brands like Papa Don't Preach, and Payal Khandwala have started getting on the trend of creating Indian wear that is sleeker and powerful rather than delicate. Still, the designs are more tailored for wedding guests than the bride. Yet as the idea of having LGBTQ+ Indian weddings becomes more and more normalized designers are going to want to start providing for the needs of individuals within this community to not only fill a huge gap in the market but also push their design skills even further to offer a larger range of products to clientele.

New Normal

This trend of strong, less dainty attire that is lightweight, sleek, but still fit for a bride is likely to entice many traditionally feminine individuals as well because the pieces are likely to be significantly easier to move in. Indian weddings often involve many dances; in fact, the sangeet is a ceremony entirely dedicated to dancing and performances by the couple, their family, and friends. However, the outfits worn to these events are often some of the most extravagant featuring many



layers of thick fabric, heavily embroidered stones, and layers of ornate jewelry- which calls for a stunning yet very (physically) heavy look. The brides often struggle to enjoy their night as their outfits are very constricting. Therefore, I think looks created from this trend will become popular as an alternative to the traditional sangeet look for many Indian women.

The times are changing, the world is evolving, and people as a whole are becoming more accepting. With this new change, cultural symbols and events are going to have to adapt to suit said changes and trends will evolve from them. All women deserve to feel like they have the ability to get something that they feel incredible in on their wedding day regardless of their sexual orientation or style, and it is now brands responsibility to provide.

“We shall overcome
and success will be
ours in the future.
The future belongs
to us.”

– Savitribai Phule, social reformer and
India's first female teacher



MASCULINITY DOES ~~NOT~~ EXIST

By Alyssa Advano

What does masculinity mean In an Indian Society? Alyssa Advano interviews 7 different men to find out just that.

As a very empowered yet typically feminine woman, the idea of masculinity has always been intriguing to me- and when I moved to India, that interest only grew further. See, I grew up in a household with a typically masculine father. Although he always enforced the idea that a man was not defined by his physical strength, ability to fix things, or the amount of hair on his chest, but instead by how he treats others, he was still very much the man of the household. I always saw a man who was very secure in his position as a male figure, so wearing pink or learning to do his daughter’s hair never came across as being an attack on his masculinity.

However, when I moved to India, a still incredibly patriarchal society, where masculinity is often held above all else, I was dumbfounded when I saw heterosexual men- who had been raised to understand that a man must have power, must enforce his rules and must above all else be respected as the head of the household- swinging their arms and holding hands as they walked down the street. Yet, the second someone mistook them for being a couple; it was an insult to their masculinity and overall manhood. It was as if the connotation of being gay or having any typical feminine trait took away a part of their manliness. So, what does masculinity mean in India? Is it

tradition where men must be aggressive and strong, or are we moving forward as world views change to showcase the idea that masculinity is more about what it takes to be a good man? Honestly, as a woman, I don’t think I can fully answer that question, so instead, I asked seven different Indian men from the ages of 19- 65, what they believe masculinity/ being a man means in Indian society.

It was interesting to hear their answers as each had very different views on the subject. Dhillon Advano, a heterosexual 19-year-old med student, believed masculinity not to exist in Indian society as it is still incredibly traditional and somewhat stuck in the past, which is not what he thinks it is to be a man. He explains, “The concept of masculinity among the upper class in India highlights and **glorifies all the worst attributes associated with being a man.** These men tend to be entitled, aggressive and egotistical ,but are praised for their behavior because of their social class and gender.” Whereas Viral understands “In our society, we are told that men must be masculine” but refuses to believe it as correct “Men are biologically and socially influenced to choose masculine traits such as being dominant, strong, independent, assertive, and in charge. Whereas woman are supposed to be feminine and as such nurturing, compassionate, empathetic, kind and loving . Yet, **these are all the traits a man should exhibit as well.**”

Rick Advano, a 56-year-old heterosexual business owner, took a different approach utilizing experts to explain the future of masculinity “According to Taryn van Niekerk from the Department of Psychology University of Cape Town the 11 masculine norms include risk-taking, disdain for homosexuality, violence, winning, emotional control, power over women, dominance, playboy, self-reliance, primacy of work, and pursuit of status.” But he does not believe any of these traits make a good man and as a result attitudes are changing, **“Even in India where masculinity has been practically deified for eons, being classically masculine is being more and more frowned upon** by society as women become more independent





and outwardly stronger.” Similarly, Makarand Khandekar, a heterosexual 61-year-old retired product engineer, sees a change in Indian society but looks to the past to explain the present outlook on not only masculinity but its link to homosexuality.

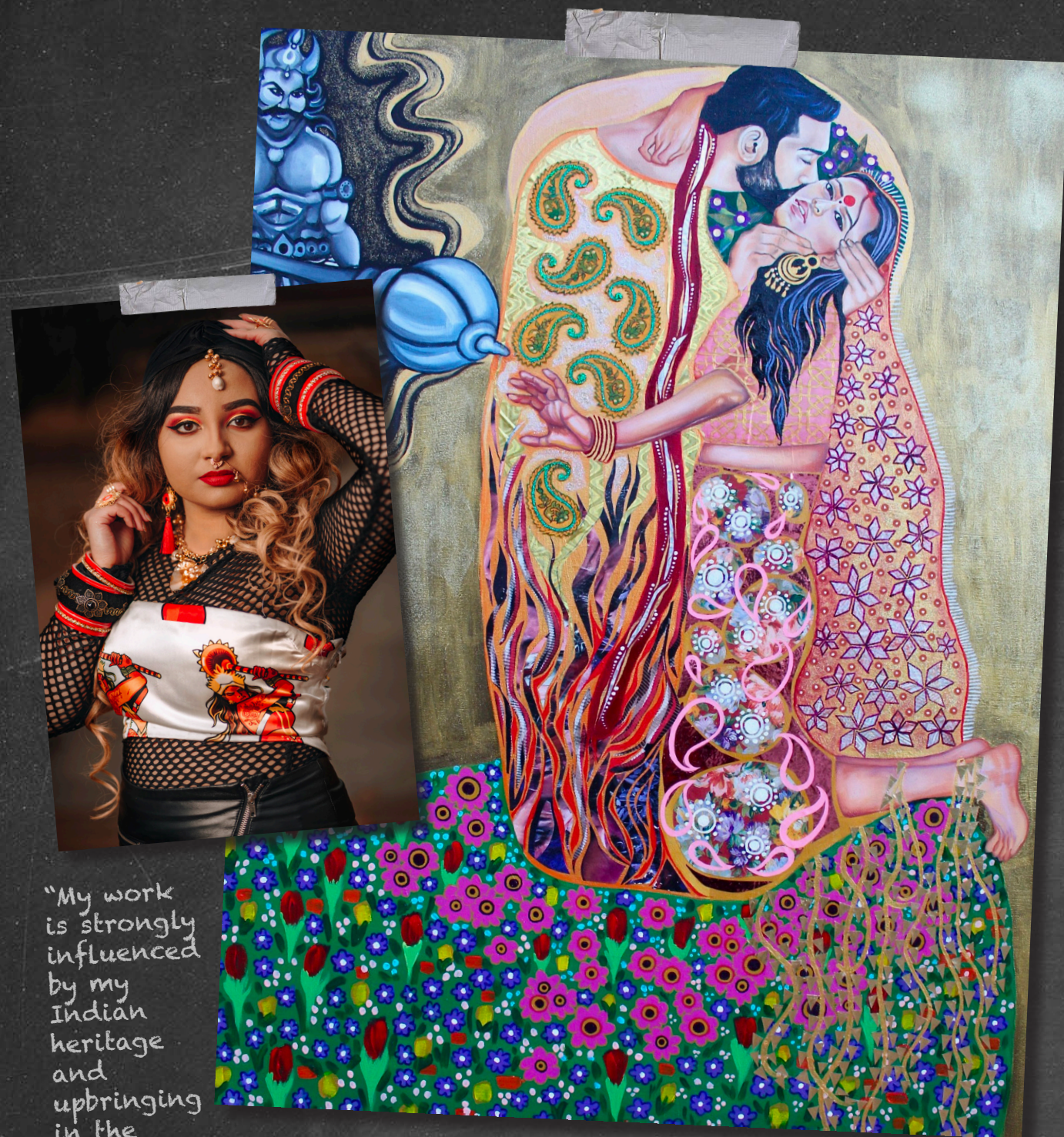
“Indian Society is predominantly patriarchal, barring a few states like Kerala. Therefore, **till the early 80s, the male child was expected to be strong and virile.** He was expected to maintain the family line, be the provider and protector of the family. This automatically made homosexuality looked down upon. Over the last 3-4 decades, though, the understanding of the human mind and behavior has increased, and homosexuality is no longer as much of a taboo due to exposure to western media, education, and travel enhancing the viewpoints.”

However, two of the men asked took a very different approach to what masculinity in Indian Society is today. Both Abhishek Kansara Adwaney a 38-year-old gay doctor and his father a retired store clerk, Haresh Kansara aged 65, believe masculinity to have nothing to do with attributes but instead a sense of personal growth. Abhishek explained masculinity as **“Being one’s own self, and not what the society might think of you,”** whilst Haresh suggested, **“Being a man and/or masculine means taking responsibility.”** This idea took my mind through a whirlwind. Still, it somehow helped me understand Deep Pathare, a gay 22-year-old LGBTQ+ activist, story a little better when speaking about what masculinity in India means to him. First, he explains that he likes to be very “fluid” when it comes to having specific gender characteristics, so as a result, masculinity has become very subjective to him. However, he explains, “Being an open gay ‘man’ in India, is very difficult. A lot of cis, straight people often use me as an example or like a black sheep of sorts. I

remember when I was in my early teens, someone’s mother told her son not to cry or use a lot of hand gestures while talking, or use a lot of hand gestures while talking, or he’ll ‘become like’ me..?!” Although, at that age, he didn’t understand what that meant, he is grateful to “express his femininity in a man’s body.”

So what did all that actually mean? Something that stood out to me was the idea that “Masculinity does not exist,” but I don’t believe that to be true. Masculinity in India is changing day by day and to each it means something different. Maybe the men holding hands and showing affection, although still afraid to be considered as less of a man, is an unconscious protest against past definitions and societal expectations of masculinity. Maybe it’s a sign of progress being made. All I know is that masculinity can no longer be defined in a simple statement, especially in Indian society, where there is this constant war between maintaining traditions that are typically patriarchal and moving forward as a whole. So yes, I believe that masculinity is defined in a very traditional manner in Indian society, but it is moving forward, and as long as we have men like those mentioned above, we will continue to do so.





"My work is strongly influenced by my Indian heritage and upbringing in the South-Asian American community. Through my work, I aim to explore the connections between feminism, culture, fashion, storytelling, Desi pop culture, and the portrayal of women throughout Indian history."

Neha Kapil

mixed media artist

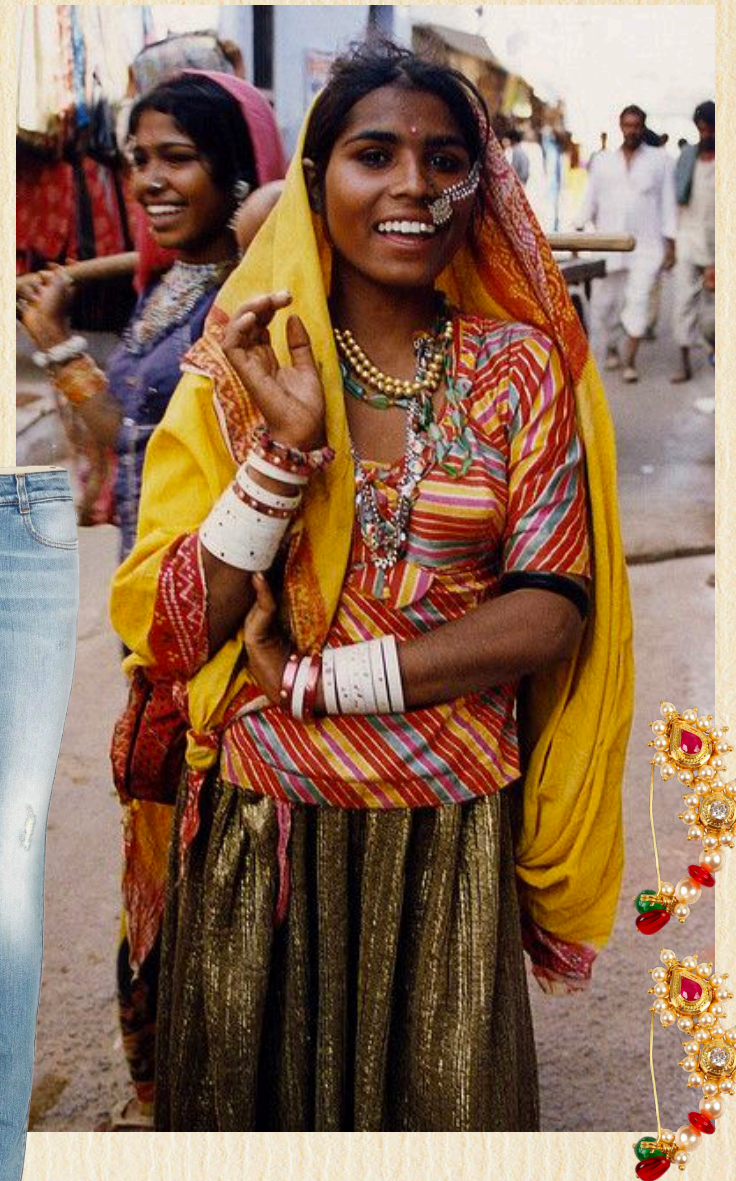


MY BODY

By Alyssa Advano

In a primarily patriarchal society, mother India is rising and her children are rising up to demand change. To demand a certain level of respect. To demand that their bodies are exactly that- theirs.

The demand for change all started in 1972- when a teenage orphaned Adivasi girl- Madhura, was brutally raped at a rural police station. Although she was living in poverty, working to feed herself through slapping animal dung on walls with her bare hands to sell as fuel, she dared to take her case to court. But the court did not believe her and chose to overturn the convictions of her attackers – two police officers set free. This act was a catalyst for the first-ever public protest about rape in India, and not only did it lead to the reformation of sexual assault laws but the case sparked a need for change in the mindsets of India's women. From there began the rise of the women's movement in India, leading to the creation of hundreds of groups designed to empower its female inhabitants.



Although many kept fighting, it seemed like over time, the majority of society forgot about Madhura and her fight for justice. That is until 2012, when 23-year-old physiotherapy student Jyoti Singh was brutally gang-raped on a moving bus in Delhi, which sparked another round of protests. A few months later, society seemed to forget again. However, in 2019 when Instagram flooded with posts about a 27-year-old vet that was raped, killed, and burned in Shadnagar, something felt different, there was an fire that couldn't be put out . It was as if Mother India said enough is enough, and the outrage from her children demanded an end to such inhumanity. Almost a year later, women are still fighting. Maybe because now that I am old enough to understand, or perhaps because technology has allowed for the world to speak up and hear the truth about what has been happening, but I feel like this is a step forward – unlike any she has taken in the past.



Today, hundreds of thousands of individuals are standing up against the patriarchy; they are standing up against a society that traditionally told them they were less than, and are looking to not only to stop the rape cases but to stop the mentality that leads to such acts of violence. In 2016 a village council not far from Delhi asked girls not to wear jeans, tight-fitting clothes, or use cell phones as they can “land girls in problems and lead to teasing.” In 2015 The Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav battled against capital punishment for rape, stating, “Ladke, ladke hain... galti ho jati hai” (boys will be boys... they commit mistakes). This attitude has been spread to the public by India’s most influential for generations, and because of a lack of education and the constant repetition of these teachings, it is often believed that women are to blame, and boys have no control. Virendra Kumar, a 37-year-old father that sells flowers on the side of the road, is one of many that feel women “Must be covered and look respectable. That way, no man will try anything. A man will only have bad thoughts about a woman if she is showing a lot of flesh. Not otherwise.” Therefore, groups such as Sayfty and the Karuna project have emerged to not only fight against acts of violence on Indian women but to educate and end the stigma associated with rape that is said to bring “shame” upon the entire family. Individuals who feel like their communities need protection have even gone as far as to create their own “rape-deterrent garments.” Computer Science students Rijul Pandey and Shalini Yadav, created sandals that would give electric shocks to molesters, and Diksha Pathak and Anjali Srivastava developed electronic tracking devices that can be sewed into jeans – all designed to protect their peers.

Although these are incredible organizations and remarkable individuals who are doing fantastic work, I cannot seem to get past the fact that in December of 2019, after the news broke of the young vet being raped and killed, thousands of people around India united. They came out from their homes and protested to make sure that those responsible were not let free like Madhura’s assailants in 1972. Even Indians that couldn’t be there in person came to support from every corner of the globe and protested using social media accounts to bring awareness to the cause in an attempt to make real change in the future. Since then, millions have become aware of not only the rape that continues to happen around India but also the education needed to stop it. Parents are beginning to teach their children that women are equal to them as well as giving them the sex education that schools in India lack, to ultimately clarify to them that consent is not a choice but a requirement.

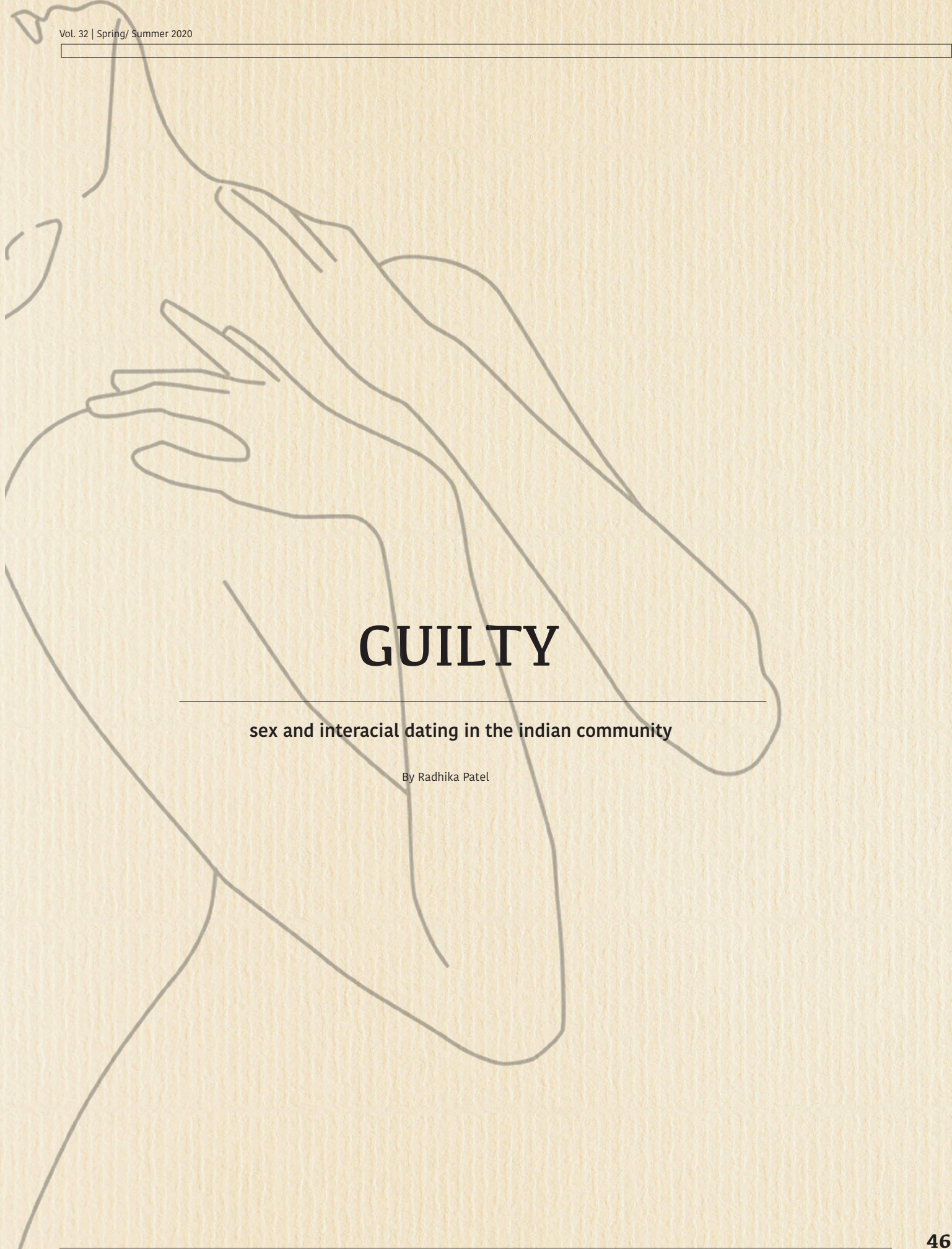


Although I believe that as a country, we are far from ending this fight, we have taken steps in recent months to truly make a change. The first step to changing the actions is awareness, and many individuals are taking even further measures by implementing equality teachings in their homes, showing support through social media, or volunteering their time and/or money to activists groups. Any small change is progress, and as we start to educate and unite, we are genuinely going to see a difference.



"[Art] was a healthy form of escapism for me, being the weird loner kid that I was for most of my school life. I was mostly inspired by cartoon shows, old 8-bit games and nature books I used to heavily indulge in."

PRIVESH TRIVEDI PAINTER



GUILTY

sex and interracial dating in the indian community

By Radhika Patel

"Indians like to emphasize how many non-Indian marriages split [...] Indians do not get divorced because they would rather stay unhappy with their significant other than be talked bad about by extended family. My parents never talked about sex growing up because it is something that is implied to never cross my mind. This is hard, especially when going to college and everyone is on birth control because they have the freedom to make choices about their bodies by themselves. I can never even imagine asking my mom if I can go on birth control...and I am 18 years old. Even though I am legally allowed to get it on my own, it would show up on insurance and my mother would see it and wonder 'where she went wrong.'"

"I told my parents I invited him [white boyfriend] to my college graduation and my dad was furious to the point where he was emotionally manipulating me. He threatened to not come to my graduation and to kill himself if I continue with the relationship (I know he didn't mean it but was saying it to be dramatic and emphasize his point of view)."

"I have yet to have had a discussion about sex with my parents. I have tried with my mom but she talks about it as if it's disgusting and tells me to shut up. I think this has also impacted me As an individual with my sexuality and my perception of it. Because I am confused. Like what do I want? What do I like? Is this okay to do? Idk what I'm doing and so on. I learned about it when I was in my last relationship. I think that's crazy. I should have known what a human body does, wants, works when you're getting intimate with someone. Not when I'm in the situation."

"Majority of my relationships I have had to tell the guy something like 'hey I doubt my parents are gonna accept you so let's just keep this as a companionship. If it gets too deep let's drop it' and that's how it goes. So it has messed up my take on relationships. Because quite frankly I've had one serious relationship and I gave him the same speech and he stayed for awhile and we ended up really loving each other but I had to let him go bec I knew I couldn't bring him to my parents. I didn't want to put him or me in that situation anymore."

“Human desires are natural but we don’t ever talk about these needs and wants in Indian culture. It’s taboo to fall out of love or fall in love with someone outside your caste, class, race, or culture.”

“The one time they had been informed of a significant other was when my dad has called me and then asked to talk with my uncle. I was living with him while going to school, and he had seen my phone background which was someone I had been seeing at the time and he was white. He then stole my phone and immediately called my dad. I was then forced to tell him and it was only a few months into this relationship. The parents didn’t like him after asking a few questions about his status and his life [...] my parents proceeded to make my life a living hell for the rest of the time we were dating and I was on the constant verge of suicide for months. At one point they flew down during finals week to berate me and make me feel like shit because I’m selfish for not thinking about them while dating someone who doesn’t care about me enough to go to university. We are no longer together but I’ve never introduced anyone else I had been dating to my parents since. I’ve been thinking about introducing my current partner to them but I’m genuinely scared to death to do so. He’s also nervous but mostly about what they might do to me.”

Everyone lives for my parents, me. They all had and I have always outgoing oddball relatives consider even though I’m because I have it comes to going activities than When I brought up of me bringing home may not be Indian or basically said she would ‘have to accept it’ but that she would never be able to be comfortable or open with him. She said it would be better for him to be from the same culture so he would understand our customs and same religion so we could all go to church together. Basically she would openly accept an Indian stranger and feel comfortable but no matter how nice the ‘foreign’ guy may be, she would never be able to fully be comfortable or talk to him (she is a preschool teacher and communicates in English just fine, but she thinks there would be a language barrier too). She also feels like it’ll be bad because she only cooks Indian food and she thinks they wouldn’t eat Indian food all the time even though that’s definitely not true when it comes to my boyfriend. He cooks great Indian food too! When my parents’ friends’ kids marry white people, they say ‘well we are not as modern as that family’ or things like ‘those partners will never stick as well with the family’ or ‘I don’t want you to be like their kids, we don’t like it’”





"It makes the Indian parents think that I am turning into someone I'm not. But as someone born in America, I am an American Indian, not just Indian. I have immersed myself in American culture since I was little. It took three years of struggles, tears, yelling, a terrible relationship with my parents and my mom threatening to disown me before they finally came around after a big family disaster that made them realize my relationship with someone who is the wrong shade of brown for them is not the biggest issue they face."



Development issues
cannot be contained
within national
boundaries.

– Medha Patkar, Indian Social Activist
and Social Reformer-turned politician



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