

APRIL 2026

ZEITGEIST

Simulacrum



DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
LADY SHRI RAM COLLEGE
FOR WOMEN



Contents

Page 3

Introduction

Page 4

Editors' Note

Page 5

Message from the Association in Charge

Page 8

From the TIC's Desk

Page 9

A tête-à-tête with Dr Priyanka Padhy

Page 16

A tête-à-tête with Dr Smita Sahgal

Page 25

Articles and Poems

Page 51

Photo Gallery

Page 55

Open Themed Submissions

Page 72

Media Review

Page 76

Psychology around the Globe

Page 79

Department Reports

Page 95

Student Achievements

Page 100

Department Association and Union

Page 105

Our Contributors

SIMULACRUM

Illusions of Intimacy.

“Something that looks like or represents something else.”
[Harvard Dictionary]

In a world shaped by screens, affection no longer requires reciprocity to feel real. We form attachments to voices that cannot hear us and to faces that do not know us, yet these connections leave a lasting emotional imprint. Simulacrum explores this fragile space where imagination begins to stand in for reality.

At its heart lies the psychology of parasocial relationships, one sided bonds that feel intimate despite their distance. What does it mean to feel seen by someone who has never seen you? These attachments, far from rare, are woven into contemporary culture and sustained by constant visibility and the illusion of access.

Illusion here is not simply deception, it is experience. The performance of closeness through curated authenticity and digital presence blurs the boundary between what is real and what is felt. Simulacrum invites us to sit with this ambiguity and reflect on how modern intimacy is shaped as much by imagination as by reality.

Editors' Note



Charvi Gupta
Team Head

There is something quietly unsettling about the way we scroll. We pause on a stranger's grief, feel it for a second, and keep moving. We mourn celebrities like old friends, celebrate milestones of people we've never met, and somehow none of it feels weird anymore. Social media didn't just change how we talk to each other, it changed what we expect from closeness itself. Intimacy gets broadcasted, relatability becomes a strategy, and somewhere along the way the line between knowing someone and knowing of someone just disappears. And yet I don't think this makes us gullible, it makes us human. We're wired to attach, and the internet gave us endless faces and voices to attach to. Simulacrum doesn't resolve that tension, it just asks you to sit with it honestly, to wonder not just why we reach for these illusions, but what that reaching says about what we're really looking for. I extend my sincere gratitude to Dr. Megha Dhillon and Dr. Siksha Deepak for their constant guidance and support, and to every contributor who put something genuine into an edition about illusions.



Meera Nair
Team Head

A like, a message, a carefully chosen word. We've become fluent in the language of closeness without always speaking its truth. Intimacy has learned to perform itself, and we, its willing audience, applaud. It is with this bittersweet awareness, and no small amount of wonder, that we welcome you to this edition of Zeitgeist. Simulacrum: Illusions of Intimacy is our humble attempt to hold a mirror up to the mirrors we hold up to ourselves.

I extend my sincere gratitude to Dr. Megha Dhillon and Dr. Siksha Deepak for their constant guidance and support, and to all those whose contributions have brought this edition of Zeitgeist to life. I would also like to thank every member of the Press and Photography Team for their unwavering dedication to making this magazine possible.



Navya Yadav
Team Head

In a world where intimacy or closeness is weighed on digital scales, this edition now exists as an exploration of the realities of human existence untainted by the screens and fleeting interactions. Simulacrum is a testament to the originality of humans, it's the declaration of a mental war between rising illusions of intimacy and genuine connections. More than anything, the idea of simulacrum rests on the foundation that we often find ourselves looking for affection and love but if these pages leave you with a feeling, no matter how small - then we've already won the great war. The process of turning one concept into a full fledged magazine was humongous and I am utterly grateful to Dr. Megha Dhillon and Dr. Siksha Deepak for their unwavering support throughout this journey.



Message from the Association in Charges



My illusion of intimacy

I wonder how the trends have changed,
Changed in me are the ways that I saw my social world.
The social world which was once filled with real,
Real, now seems those whom I never get to meet.
Meet ups are planned sometimes,
Sometimes are never equal to often.
Often, I question what I have gotten into??
Into the realm of seeking the ones who want only my views,
My views are their earning.
Earning they are but, what are they giving me??
Giving me the solace of their presence.
Presence that is there in mundane,
Mundane has no charm but it has the calm.
Calm, that comes when I see them doing everyday rituals.
Rituals?? I wonder I too engage in every day.

Everyday, I still see them uselessly,
Uselessly! I wonder.. they must be serving some purpose to me.
To me their purpose is..I find them real and mine and close.
Close?? I think like me to them are many,
Many of them are there and I like to watch a few.
A few of them make me feel their presence in my life,
My life feels full in their presence.
Their presence?? Their presence is an illusion!!!
An illusion, being drawn by it is my need,
The need of my lonely life!!!

Balance is the Key

Zeitgeist Valedictory Session

As I begin to wonder,
What has been learnt collectively about
How to harness AI as a tool for mental well-being?
We now know about natural language processing, pattern recognition engines,
predictive analysis and large language models.
Also that through generative AI, you give autonomy to the machines.
It was amazing for us to know that AI can now even sense one's emotions,
It can transform noise into a clinical signal.
Now we are assured that the empty chair gap can be filled through the AI chatbot.
The convergence of the human and machine intelligence
is truly the transforming force.
The ecosystem of AI is rich and varied like conversational agents,
clinical assistants, mood and emotion tracking systems and also crisis prediction.
Not to forget the humans are drivers of the AI governed tools.
With all that knowledge
We will be sensitive masters and not blindly following fools.
To be available digitally and in-person too is the need of the time.
It's important to remember that collectivity in the spirit is the age old 'wine'.
It's rather amusing to know about adolescence that it just doesn't end at 18
but goes on till 25 and even 32.

It was quite reassuring for all the mistakes that I have been making!
But it's heartbreaking to know that there is no time to self,
to imbibe and try to be someone else rather than just being.
But now we are hopeful that we have initiated
the dialogue amongst and the introspection within.
To continue to chase the balance between AI and being humane.

We feel full

Mental Health Awareness Week

As I stand here to see,
What we have secured by
At the end of this Mental Health Awareness Initiative, during catastrophes
and emergencies?
We have secured our box of psychological first aid with active listening,
ensured safety and calm reassurance & we have discarded judgement for
which my heart is in glee.
We have realised the power to control our thoughts,
the intention to write down what bothers & alter with the utility of CBT.
We are hopeful now that by using it all during the crisis, we all can be
distress-free.
We have learnt that curfews, migration, loss, lack of moral ambiguity,
invisible distress are poison and stunt the growth of budding trees.
I am wishful that by reframing their psychological framework
psychologists and researchers can be more skilful and impactful garden
referees.
I now understand that care has to be equitable to the marginalised and
services to them with consideration we have to feed.
Lastly, we have felt and understood the varied challenges that women face
during such calamities,
and the sensitivity, voice, agency, and equity that they are in dire need of.
As this Mental Health Awareness Initiative comes to a close today,
It has truly opened our minds and hearts
In yet another significant way.

Dr. Siksha Deepak

From the TIC's Desk

When a beloved public figure dies in this country, entire cities convene. Flowers appear in the cinema halls. Strangers weep in a shared vigil for someone who never knew any of their names. That mourning is neither pathology nor performance. It is the accumulated weight of years of one-sided witness that the mind, faithful to its own experience, has stored as something it cannot meaningfully distinguish from genuine real-life relationships. The bond was psychologically real. It was simply never more than one person deep.



It is this displacement, where the distant and unreachable begins to feel more intimate in connection than the real, that Baudrillard called the Simulacrum: the representation so thoroughly substituted for reality that the question of the original becomes, in time, beside the point. What he could not have fully anticipated is how imperceptibly the contemporary self would come to inhabit that substitution, and how little it would feel like loss. The parasocial bond does not present itself as imitation. It arrives as familiarity, as continuity, as the quiet but persistent sense of being accompanied through one's own life by someone who, across years of disclosed thought and performed candour, has come to occupy the interior with all the weight of presence.

This edition of the magazine does not approach that phenomenon as an aberration, rather as evidence: of what the self requires, of what the age provides in its place, and of the distance, sometimes vast and sometimes negligible, between the two. The work gathered across these pages reflects a department that has chosen to ask uncomfortable questions with the seriousness and creative endeavour they deserve, across forms, disciplines, and registers that together make the inquiry richer than any single voice could.

To the editorial board and to every contributor: what you have assembled here is rigorous, considered, and necessary. It is a publication that earns its existence. With warm wishes,

Dr. Bhawna Devi

A tête-à-tête

Interview with

Dr. Priyanka Padhy

Department of Psychology, LSR

Through the Looking Glass: Mirage of Resilience and Intimacy in our Contemporary Lives.

An interview with Dr. Priyanka Padhy, psychologist, educator, and researcher whose work spans resilience, disability, gender, and child development. The conversation was as honest as it was illuminating, moving through care, connection, voice, and play with the kind of warmth that only comes from decades of genuine engagement with people and ideas.



Meera: Ma'am, to begin, in your years of working with children, students, and institutions, when have you most clearly seen care being performed rather than genuinely felt? And what does that distinction do to a person's psychological development?

Dr. Padhy: I would say that I think I'm very fortunate to have worked in spaces and with people and institutions where I have actually seen more genuine instances of care than performative ones. My entire work around resilience, my PhD work, was trying to understand what makes a child and a family resilient in the face of chronic illness, and the entire perspective was systemic: how do the systems around an individual actually enable resilience? I've seen some of the most solid relationships of care in healthcare settings, not necessarily between doctors and patients, but between allied healthcare workers. A diabetes educator, a transfusion nurse, or even a ward support staff member, and their relationship with the child and the family. I've seen how strong those acts of care can be in providing anchorage to families that are really struggling.

Similarly, I've seen a lot of care being invested in classrooms by teachers. I think one of the primary reasons we are moving in the direction of more performative care is the expansion of class sizes. When I started my career, class sizes used to be around 25. It is so much more possible to reach out to each student, to know their stories, their struggles, and provide holding spaces for all of them, as opposed to a class of 100 plus. Over there, you're almost compelled to perform certain acts of care, rather than offer ones that are genuinely, deeply felt and received.

Charvi: That sense of being truly received brings us to our next question. Many young people today feel deeply "seen" online yet profoundly lonely offline. From a psychosocial lens, and in light of recent events such as the Ghaziabad triple suicide case, how do simulated forms of connection shape our capacity for real intimacy?

Dr. Padhy: We shouldn't undermine the need itself. There is definitely something missing. If I think of relationships and interactions as a recipe, clearly one or more ingredients are missing in the offline ones, and that's the reason why youngsters, and not just youngsters, everyone, seems to be gravitating with such attraction towards online relationships. Like you're saying, they feel seen over there. The recipe is better, it's better balanced, it's giving them sweet and savory and everything in between. And that seems to be missing in real-world or offline relationships.

So instead of pooh-poohing that and negating it, it's better that we open our eyes and recognize that we are missing the mark when it comes to meaningful relationships. There is something youngsters are looking for which they are not able to find in the real world. Maybe it's a non-judgmental space where they don't feel they will have to be answerable in a punitive way. Maybe there is a certain degree of excitement in things that feel a little stealthy. But we have to really genuinely connect with what it is that people are looking for when they turn towards that. Because if we just skim the surface and ignore it, or worse, judge it, we are going to end up with more and more of these situations. And look at the tragedy of it. When we lose young people to such meaningless tragedy, that's really a warning bell for all of us.

Navya: Ma'am, as someone philosophically aligned with the interpretivist paradigm, how do you personally differentiate between empathy as a human response and empathy as a professional or institutional requirement?

Dr. Padhy: Carl Rogers says some very interesting things about empathy from his person-centred framework. I think one can spend an entire lifetime trying to understand empathy and it will just remain a journey, it will never become the destination. There will never be a day when you reach a point and say, "I have completely understood and mastered what empathy is about." It will always be a process.

And necessarily, all of these things will be overlapping. The empathy that I feel as a person, and the empathy that I need to show in my job as a teacher, there are overlaps. I don't think, as a human being, these are like slices of a pizza that are totally separate and can be neatly pried apart. They are more like layers of an onion, there is a lot of fluid movement between all of it. What I would say is that if you are a reflective practitioner and a reflective human being, then these processes will inform each other. If I'm a reflective person in general, then even in my professional and institutional spaces, that same reflexivity is going to inform my practice as a teacher. It's more of a personal capacity to build, and then it will have ripple effects across everything else that you do.

Meera: That idea of reflexivity translating into practice connects very naturally to our next question. In classrooms and workplaces, inclusion is often discussed as policy rather than practice. From your experience, what does 'inclusion on paper' look like, and how does it impact the psyche of those who are being "included"?

Dr. Padhy: This harks back to some of the cross-cultural research I have undertaken, and our findings spoke very loudly about this. Typically, when institutions talk about inclusion, they are talking about: we have met the requirement on these governmental policies, and therefore we can call ourselves an inclusive institution. But that's very different from the experience of inclusion within classrooms.

Professor Krishna Kumar, who is a stalwart in the field of education, says that inclusion is not about actually bringing students into the classroom, but about making them feel visible within the four walls of the classroom. It's only when somebody experiences not just equal opportunity, but also equal chances of becoming successful, that you can truly call a space inclusive.

Accommodations, affirmative action, all of this is required, as governmental mandate and more philosophically, as a human rights issue. But we also need to put our ears to the ground. Whichever population we are talking about, persons with disability, persons from socially or economically disadvantaged backgrounds, we need to hear from them. It needs to come from within. It needs to come from the stakeholder as to what will make them feel they have equal opportunity. If we do it from an us-versus-them position, there will always be a gap. Nobody wants to be in that recipient position. Nobody wants to feel that this is being done for them. The positioning needs to change. Those people need to come into the driver's seat and drive that change from within. Only then can we really talk about inclusion.

Charvi: And that question of who drives the narrative brings us to voice itself. You've worked closely with populations who are often spoken about but rarely spoken with. How does voice, or the lack of it, shape one's view of society?

Dr Padhy: This is exactly what we talk about in most of our coursework, whether it's psychology of disability or anything from the critical paradigm. We talk about voice, agency, uncovering those voices that have never found a place at the table. And again, when we do that in academic spaces, we can become self-appointed voices for the voiceless. That's something one has to be very cautious about. Are we taking upon ourselves some mandate of voicing something that belongs to somebody else? And in the process, are we co-opting, are we taking away whatever vestiges of agency they might still have?

The best of the essays I have read in my life have been first-person accounts of people who have gone through certain experiences. Whether it's Kancha Ilaiah talking about why he's not a Hindu, or Azra Razak talking about growing up as a Muslim girl in Uttar Pradesh, these are first-person accounts of who and what I am, and what my reality is like. There is immense potential in our discipline to do that. To actually centre those voices and not become mouthpieces for somebody else's reality. You and I together, all of us in this discipline, should try and expand on those possibilities as much as possible.

Navya: Ma'am, your early work as a school counsellor and volunteer involved very direct, human encounters. How has the meaning of 'helping' changed for you over time, especially in increasingly mediated professional spaces?

Dr. Padhy: I think you become a little wary of the word help and helping. And I think that's part of the maturational process of being in our discipline. One of the most common things students say when seeking admission in psychology, when you ask them why they want to study it, is: "Because I love helping people." And then it's only a decade later, and many years of self-discovery later, that you realize the only person you can possibly help in any real capacity is yourself.

There is a lot that can happen between people, facilitation, mentoring, guiding. But help is not the word any of us would be comfortable using after a few years of training and studying psychology. I'm here for what this discipline brings to me, and I try to bring the best of myself to it, rather than really helping or changing something about somebody else. There is of course a larger calling, this is the kind of work I want to do because it speaks to me, it speaks to what I think my life should contribute to. But I've made peace with the fact that changing somebody else's reality is not what I'm going to be able to achieve. And that, truly, is not something worth aspiring for.

Meera: In your studies on gender, work-from-home cultures, and cyber harassment, did you notice any new forms of emotional closeness emerging alongside the more troubling findings?

Dr. Padhy: Those researches were so shocking, so jarring, in some ways. We went in under the impression that there would be a sharp decline in sexual harassment during the COVID lockdown period, because women were not going to work.

We were extremely shocked to find that it just changed forms. It took on a different avatar and was very much there. In fact, in some ways it was worse than before, the boundary between work and life had become very blurred. We were literally in each other's homes without being invited. Everybody could see where one lives, what the home looks like. And the inroads that built into making harassment possible was something very, very shocking to realize.

But in terms of connection, yes. There has to be something said about how people gravitated towards online relationships and friendships during that period. The Me Too movement, I think, was an important one in that sense. People seeking and getting courage from each other's acts of courage and bravery. That really stands out in my memory from that research.

Charvi : Ma'am, the concept of play features prominently in your academic work. In an adult world driven by productivity and performance, how does play shape our view of intimacy and social roles?

Dr. Padhy : Of all the developmental psychology concepts and constructs, the one that really speaks to me is play. Play is the essentially alive part of all of us. We are constantly playing in some way or the other. We just have this erroneous idea that playing hide-and-seek is play. But if I'm sitting here talking to you, and there is a little thing hanging from the side of my bag and I'm constantly fidgeting with it, making it into knots and twirls, that is play with object. I could also be playing with words while I talk to you, playing with ideas. I could be thinking of a new recipe to try tonight and playing with ingredients. Play is necessarily the alive part of all of us.

It is a great disservice to adults when we say play is for kids. Adults can play in so many ways, in their intimacies, in their social relationships, there is so much capacity to be playful. One has to remind oneself about that. Kuch bhi ho jaye, koi bhi situation life mein ho, one has to keep the playfulness alive. There has to be that spark. Some of us find it with animals or pets. Some with children. Some with partners or friends or just by ourselves. The possibilities are immense. I truly, really, really feel fascinated by the idea of playfulness and play.

Navy : And finally, ma'am, drawing from both your research and your experiences as a professor, what advice would you offer students who are trying to build lives and relationships that feel authentic and kind?

Dr. Padhy: Authenticity is about just showing up as who you are. And there is no formula that can be given to anybody about it. The intention has to be there, because it is difficult. It is very, very challenging to not hide behind a facade and take the easy way of not being authentic. One has to really own up to it. And it's not always pleasant.

I struggle with it myself, I tend to be a pleaser in a lot of my relationships, and I fear the repercussions of coming across as unpleasant or disrespectful because of my socialization. Authenticity could mean standing up in front of people and saying: this is not okay by me. But how do you do that when you've been socialized as a woman, as a daughter, as a daughter-in-law, as a wife, told that standing up for yourself comes at a certain cost? A lot of these dilemmas have to be worked with and worked through. Authenticity is very difficult to actually translate into our lives. But we can take measured steps towards it. You can have somebody who's your accountability monitor, your authenticity check, somebody who reminds you to be kind.

Kindness, I think, is easier. It is almost at a visceral, deeply thoughtless level that kindness needs to ooze from you. There's this beautiful adage, when there's a choice between being kind or unkind, always choose kind. If in any moment there is a call between whether this can be done this way or that way, choose the kind way of doing it.



A tête-à-tête

Interview with

Dr. Smita Sahgal

Department of History, LSR



Divine Intimacy as Simulacrum.

Through the lens of parasocial relationships, we try and explore how devotion and worship can become spaces where individuals risk losing themselves through idolisation and faith in perceived higher or “special” powers. Drawing from bhakti traditions, the conversation aims to reflect on how intimacy with the divine is cultivated through ritual. This produces a powerful sense (illusion) of closeness that is emotionally real, yet structurally one-sided.

Meera: So ma'am, you've been associated with LSR since 1995, witnessing multiple generations of students and ideological shifts. As a historian, how has such a long relationship with the institution shaped your understanding of belonging, memory and authority?

Dr. Sahgal : As a historian, I've seen clear changes over my 31 years at Lady Shri Ram College for Women, and even earlier in 1988. Back then, especially into the mid-90s, the college felt quite elitist. Most students came from English-speaking backgrounds and consciously maintained that identity. They were extremely bright but also intimidating. As a young teacher, I often felt nervous because they were so well-prepared and constantly questioning.

Over time, the student body has become much more diverse, and the distance between students has reduced, which is a positive shift. At the same time, competition has increased, and participation is sometimes driven more by monetary rewards than by learning or recognition.

Another major change is the impact of mobile phones. Earlier, teaching was a direct interaction between teacher and student. Now there is always a third presence, making it harder to hold attention in class.

Students today also face much greater pressure, with longer days and more exams. Earlier, college life allowed more space to explore and enjoy. Now it often feels like a stepping stone to the next goal.

That said, there are positives too. The campus has improved, students have access to more spaces, and their creativity is clearly visible. Overall, it has been a mixed experience, with each phase having its own value.

Charvi: That's a very beautiful way to put it, ma'am. So ma'am, the next question is that, from a historian's perspective, how does memory, personal or collective, construct emotional closeness with the past, even when that past would be selectively remembered or idolized?

Dr. Sahgal: As a student and teacher of history, I've seen a clear shift over the years. Memory is now accepted as an important tool for reconstructing the past, which wasn't the case earlier in the positivist tradition, where only verifiable facts were valued.

That said, memory comes with a caveat. It is selective and deeply personal. People choose what to remember and what to forget, sometimes unintentionally, and sometimes deliberately. For instance, in Partition narratives, many people, especially women, may avoid recalling painful experiences. This creates gaps in our understanding.

So while memory is important, historians treat it cautiously. We take it seriously but also try to verify it through other sources to build a more complete picture. A good example is *Vande Mataram*, written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. In *Anandamath*, he highlights the rebellion of Hindu sanyasis but leaves out the role of Muslim fakirs, even though they were also part of it. This shows how memory and narrative can be selective.

That is why a historian's role is crucial. We cannot rely on one version alone. We have to bring together multiple sources and perspectives to understand the past more fully. Memory is valuable, but it must always be placed within a larger, more balanced context.

Navya: Yes, ma'am, that totally makes sense. Let me go to the next question. So ma'am, in the context of early Vedic religion, how did the later shift towards deeply personal and emotional expressive devotion to a chosen deity transform or reinterpret the earlier ritual specific or sacrificial or priest-mediated religion frameworks of Vedic practice?

Dr. Sahgal: The early Vedic tradition was largely based on Karmakand, or rituals and sacrifices carried out in the public domain. If we leave aside the later Upanishadic layer, this tradition mainly revolves around sacrifice, including animal offerings. But this should not be judged by today's idea of violence. In that context, sacrifice had a logic. It began with the idea of sacrificing the self and more broadly meant giving up something dear in the hope of receiving something greater in return.

In that sense, Vedic religion had a negotiatory aspect. Offerings were made to deities, believed to be present during rituals, in exchange for things like wealth, cattle, or success. Even today, people do something similar at a personal level by giving up something if their wish is fulfilled. The difference is that earlier this happened publicly and on a larger scale.

At the same time, the Vedic tradition was not only material. Some hymns in the Rigveda, like the Nasadiya, Hiranyagarbha, and Purushukta, already reflect spiritual ideas. This becomes more pronounced in the Upanishads, such as the Chandogya and Brihadaranyaka, where the focus shifts to inner discipline and self-realisation, and sacrifice becomes internal. Similar ideas also appear in Jain and Buddhist traditions.

However, these philosophies were often too abstract for common people. Concepts like dukkha, anicca, and nirvana were not always easy to grasp. As religion became more complex, bhakti emerged as a simpler and more relatable path. In the Bhagavad Gita, devotion is presented as a personal relationship between the devotee and God, rooted in love.

This shift made religion more personal and reduced the centrality of rituals, while also blurring caste and class distinctions. At the same time, these traditions still acknowledged the authority of the Vedas, even as they moved in a different direction.

An important change with bhakti was the role of women. While women existed in earlier traditions, the focus was largely on men. With bhakti becoming more personal, women found greater space to participate, and this also subtly challenged patriarchal norms.

Meera: Makes a lot of sense, ma'am. Ma'am, so how can we understand the deep sense of personal closeness between a devotee and a deity in historical religious practices? Was this intimacy purely spiritual or was it shaped by broader social and cultural structures?

Dr Sahgal: There were clear reasons for the emergence of bhakti. Over time, religion had become very complex and inaccessible. Rituals under Karmakand were expensive and limited mostly to Brahmins and Kshatriyas, while the masses remained outsiders. Similarly, the path of knowledge required intense discipline and training, which was not easy for everyone.

In this context, bhakti offered a simpler alternative. It focused on personal devotion and emotional connection with God. A similar idea can be seen in the Sufi tradition, which developed in an Islamic, Persian-Turkish context, and even in Christianity with devotion to Christ. These traditions, though different in origin, share the idea of selfless devotion.

Bhakti emerged within a specific social context. It can be seen as both a personal and social response to the anxieties of the time. It allowed individuals to express their emotions while also questioning existing social structures.

For example, in 12th century Karnataka, the Veerashaiva movement led by Basavanna challenged caste hierarchies. Through his vachanas, he emphasized a close, personal connection with God, referred to as Ishtalinga. His idea of “work is worship” rejected the notion that only certain castes could be spiritually elevated and questioned the stigma attached to manual labour.

The movement also opened space for women. Figures like Akkadevi were welcomed into forums such as the Anubhava Mantapa, where spiritual experiences were shared and debated. Allowing women to participate equally, even during times considered “impure” in orthodox traditions, was a significant shift.

Of course, there were limitations, as most recorded voices still belonged to men. But for its time, even these changes were quite radical. Overall, bhakti responded to both caste and gender inequalities, while making religion more personal and accessible.

Charvi: Yes, ma'am, that is actually a very thoughtful way to see it. Ma'am, when tantric practices claim direct union with the divine, does the ritual reveal reality or does it in some way create it? And how can historians responsibly interpret that distinction?

Dr. Sahgal: From a historian's perspective, these are belief-based or assumed realities, because there is no direct way to verify them. What we can acknowledge is their strong impact on human consciousness and behavior. But whether they are objectively real remains open to skepticism.

Take tantric rituals, for example. A historian can observe that they may bring about emotional or psychological changes, even something like a hypnotic effect. But whether this experience is real or constructed cannot be confirmed. That kind of evaluation would be better handled by psychologists or medical experts.

History, as a discipline, relies on evidence and verification. So while we cannot prove the authenticity of such experiences, we can clearly see their social impact. These practices often create a sense of collective consciousness and influence people in powerful ways.

What we cannot determine is whether individuals are truly experiencing something, or if it is shaped by belief, suggestion, or even performance. There is simply no way for a historian to test or confirm that.

Navya: Yes, ma'am. Fully makes sense. Ma'am, so in your work on gender and religion, have you found that women's devotion is more frequently framed as self-erasure rather than self-realisation? And how do texts and traditions reinforce or resist this framing?

Dr. Sahgal: It really depends on how we understand self-erasure and self-realisation. In the bhakti tradition, self-erasure is often seen as the highest form of self-realisation. This idea comes through clearly in devotional songs and stories.

For example, there is the story of Andal, a devotee of Lord Ranganatha. According to the legend, she saw herself as already married to the deity, and in the end, is believed to have merged with the idol itself. As historians, we know such events cannot be verified. But the fact that people believe and preserve such stories shows how devotion is imagined at its peak, as complete union with the divine.

At the same time, bhakti also has a gendered dimension. The devotee, or bhakta, is often symbolically feminised, even if the devotee is male. A similar idea exists in Sufi traditions, in the relationship between the disciple and the master. Here, surrender and self-erasure become central to devotion.

This also reflects existing gender hierarchies, where the feminine is often seen as subordinate. So to express complete devotion, even men adopt this feminised position.

However, if we look at the jnana tradition, we do find examples of strong female voices. One such example is Sulabha, who engages in a philosophical debate with King Janaka and challenges his claims of spiritual superiority. Her presence shows that women could assert intellectual and spiritual authority, even if such examples are rare.

So overall, while bhakti often emphasises surrender and self-erasure, it also opens up complex questions about gender and power.

Meera: So ma'am, much of your research work interrogates masculinity in early India. How did ideals of masculine restraint and control shape who was allowed emotional or devotional intimacy with gods?

Dr. Sahgal: Masculinity today is not seen as one fixed idea. There are different types of masculinities, shaped by social and political contexts. Even within bhakti, we can see these variations.

Take the example of Arjun and Krishna from the Bhagavad Gita. Both represent what we call hegemonic masculinity, meaning they are ideal figures people look up to.

But just before the war, Arjun becomes emotional and hesitant when he sees his own family on the battlefield. Krishna, as his charioteer and guide, tries to reason with him, but logic alone does not work. It is only when Krishna reveals his virat roop that Arjun is convinced and agrees to fight. So here, Arjun's masculinity does not become weaker. Instead, it takes a different form. He becomes a bhakta, someone who is willing to surrender because he believes in a higher truth. This shows that masculinity within bhakti can include surrender, without losing strength or confidence.

We see something similar in history as well. For instance, Krishnadevaraya was both a powerful ruler and a devoted bhakta of Lord Venkateshwara. His devotion did not take away from his authority. Instead, his surrender to God became a mark of his strength.

Another example is Yudhishtir. After the war, he wants to give up everything, but through his dialogue with Bhishma, he slowly reshapes the idea of kingship. He agrees to rule, but with detachment. This reflects what can be called ascetic masculinity, where one performs duties without attachment, similar to the idea of nishkama karma in the Gita.

Overall, masculinity in bhakti is complex. It is not just about dominance or power. It can include surrender, devotion, and detachment, while still carrying confidence and authority. Figures like Kabir, Tukaram, and even Mirabai show that this path often involved social resistance, but also created new ways of expressing strength and identity.

Charvi: Right, maam, that's actually a very wonderful way to put it and think about it. Maam we wanted to know if early Indian monastic institutions genuinely dissolved worldly attachments or did they construct a new symbolic order that simulated transcendence while generating alternative forms of authority, hierarchy and controlled intimacy?

Dr. Sahgal: Monastic institutions were originally meant to help people move away from worldly life and focus on spirituality. That's why Jain and Buddhist monasteries came up, and later traditions linked to Adi Shankaracharya, the Nath Sampradaya, or saints like Tukaram followed a similar idea that is detachment from everyday life. But over time, these monasteries also became alternative households and centres of power. Even though many monks and ascetics lived as renunciants and set examples of discipline, they still depended on common people for support. Because of this constant connection with society, they gradually started gaining influence social as well as political. We see this even in history. During the time of Ashoka, there were already divisions within the Buddhist Sangha, and he had to step in to maintain its original purpose. Later on, groups like the Naga sadhus became actively involved in politics, sometimes even taking up armed roles or supporting rulers. So while these traditions were meant to move away from worldly life, they often got drawn back into it. At the same time, they did succeed in some ways. Early texts like the Therigatha show how people, especially women, found genuine peace and happiness in monastic life. But in later periods, some traditions became more involved in power and influence.

As for their hold over people, many ascetics were seen as spiritually powerful, sometimes even capable of miracles. This gave them strong influence, because people felt they could solve their problems. This is very different from what Gautama Buddha taught—he said he was a guide, not someone who would do the work for you. But for many people, that path is harder, and the idea of quick solutions or miracles becomes more appealing. So in the end, monastic traditions did aim to detach people from the world, and sometimes succeeded but they also became part of worldly structures themselves.

Navya: Yes, that actually makes a lot of sense. As contemporary psychology speaks of parasocial relationships and intimacy, do you see meaningful parallels with historical devotional relationships? Or do you just see comparisons risking just merely oversimplifying religious experiences?

Dr. Sahgal: I am not certain whether such experiences are objectively real, but I can clearly see their impact on individuals. Concepts like *fana* the idea of merging into something greater suggest a state of spiritual ecstasy. As a historian, I observe that something is indeed happening, whether it is genuine or perceived. For the individual, however, the experience often feels completely real and can bring a deep sense of satisfaction or emotional relief, such as after interacting with a spiritual leader.

From my perspective, what is most evident is the visible effect the sense of fulfillment and well-being. Whether this arises from genuine experience, self-conviction, or even a placebo effect is difficult to determine. However, the impact itself is undeniable. When such experiences extend beyond individuals to larger groups, they become even more significant as a subject of study.

For instance, public expressions of devotion, even in extreme situations like those seen in relation to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, demonstrate the powerful social force of belief. People may act with extraordinary conviction, even risking their lives, driven by a deep personal and collective connection. This illustrates the immense power of religion and devotion. As a historian, I rely on textual sources, which often present such spiritual experiences as real. However, it is difficult to verify their objective truth. What can be said with certainty is that individuals are experiencing or at least expressing something profound. The line between what is real and what is represented in texts often becomes blurred. Ultimately, while I may not be able to confirm the authenticity of spiritual intimacy, I can confidently observe and acknowledge the experience itself as meaningful to those who feel it.

Navya: Yes, that actually makes a lot of sense. As contemporary psychology speaks of parasocial relationships and intimacy, do you see meaningful parallels with historical devotional relationships? Or do you just see comparisons risking just merely oversimplifying religious experiences?

Dr. Sahgal: I am not certain whether such experiences are objectively real, but I can clearly see their impact on individuals.

Concepts like fana the idea of merging into something greater suggest a state of spiritual ecstasy. As a historian, I observe that something is indeed happening, whether it is genuine or perceived. For the individual, however, the experience often feels completely real and can bring a deep sense of satisfaction or emotional relief, such as after interacting with a spiritual leader.

From my perspective, what is most evident is the visible effect the sense of fulfillment and well-being. Whether this arises from genuine experience, self-conviction, or even a placebo effect is difficult to determine. However, the impact itself is undeniable. When such experiences extend beyond individuals to larger groups, they become even more significant as a subject of study.

For instance, public expressions of devotion, even in extreme situations like those seen in relation to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, demonstrate the powerful social force of belief. People may act with extraordinary conviction, even risking their lives, driven by a deep personal and collective connection. This illustrates the immense power of religion and devotion. As a historian, I rely on textual sources, which often present such spiritual experiences as real. However, it is difficult to verify their objective truth. What can be said with certainty is that individuals are experiencing or at least expressing something profound. The line between what is real and what is represented in texts often becomes blurred. Ultimately, while I may not be able to confirm the authenticity of spiritual intimacy, I can confidently observe and acknowledge the experience itself as meaningful to those who feel it.

Meera: Ma'am, after over three decades of teaching and research, what intellectual habits or ethical sensibilities do you most want students to develop when engaging with tradition, belief and structures of authority?

Dr. Sahgal: Intellectually, I encourage my students to keep their mental horizons open and stay rooted in their basic training—critical thinking. We do not claim to have all the answers; rather, we aim to ask meaningful and plausible questions and attempt solutions, even if they are incomplete. No question is too difficult to raise, and the effort to think matters as much as the answer itself.

Secondly, after over four decades as a student, teacher, and global citizen, I emphasize the importance of ethical awareness. One cannot remain purely objective at all times; an ethical sensibility must guide our understanding. My constant appeal to students is to learn the art of coexistence. Differences of opinion are inevitable, but even in disagreement, we must allow others the space to think differently. As Voltaire famously said, one may disagree with another's views but must defend their right to express them. Disagreement is valuable—it pushes us to rethink and refine our perspectives. However, our opinions should not be imposed as universally valid. This understanding resonates with Anekantavada and Syadvada in Jain philosophy, which emphasize the relativity and partial nature of truth. What is true from one perspective may differ from another, and both deserve space to coexist.

Therefore, rather than forcing our views, we must work towards mutual acceptance. Coexistence is essential—it is the only sustainable solution to human conflicts. History, as a discipline, reinforces this by helping us understand the past and interpret the present more clearly. Ultimately, I hope students learn to engage with multiple perspectives and create space for others to live and think alongside them.

Charvi: Thank you so much, ma'am, for sharing your thoughts with us. We truly appreciate you taking the time for this conversation. It was really wonderful speaking with you.



Jermaine Smith
The Sound of Pentecost



ARTICLES

and

POEMS



At times,
No apparent reason is needed to hate someone.
But ironically, many times, you've got a million reasons
to hate the one, but you just can't-
Regardless of how hard you try,
This is not what your heart desires.
The constant reminder of you being "casually" cruel,
Is washed away by the recollections of ecstasy I shared with you.
You gave me all the grounds to despise,
And I wanted to- I really did-
Still do.
But never really wanted to look away from my favorite eyes.
Them, suppressing a million lies,
But what do I care?
When I'm already wise.

Tell me,
How can I hate that goofy smile?
Those sparkling eyes, the voice that I can recognize from a mile?
But, how will I pardon you?
For the gut-wrenching torment-
The agony that turned me into a poet.
The brutality, the never-ending heartache,
I might add.

Maybe I don't know how to hate you,
But I don't know how to not hate you either.
I've got a million reasons to hate you,
But I just-

Natasa Majumder
Political science (1st year)

Persistent

I don't feel in the slightest anymore
for our nights shared,
the songs heard
and your life so non-existent
What were my fears back then?
For what was I so persistent?

My trivial worries were they?
Or was I on insanity's door
for I am aware that all feel lonely
But maybe I really felt more?

Why? For every night, the same song
killed me again and again
and yet I let it,
just to feel your touch again
and grieve for you
in your non-existent pain
Trust me, it all felt so real
I was knocking on walls I couldn't hear through,
for nothing ever existed back there
My cries were all those walls,
could ever bear.

The song is not the same anymore
I do not cry
I heal, I love
Although I wonder why
I lost myself as such
that I had to
Love you for my sake so much?

Why did I have to cry tears
for an embrace so non-existent?
Why was my soul lonely
and ever so, "persistent"?

KOI

Unsaid

You made me feel seen in a world full of souls,
And my soul seemed to recognise yours.
But what I hoped would last a lifetime lasted a few seconds-
A moment so brief, yet it stays in my heart till now,
Somewhere deep down.

I tried to light the candle between us again and again,
But maybe the wind was too strong,
Maybe you weren't meant to be mine.
But somewhere deep down, I always knew.
Only one person was shielding the flame between us,
As if it meant the world.

Maybe that is why I imagined gardens and roses,
Even when the only thing that existed
Was a graveyard full of dead petals on the ground.
Because sometimes the heart paints beauty
Even in places where our mind knows
The flowers will never bloom.

And maybe that's where I lost myself-
A space where reality took a pause,
And my wishes became so real
that even though flowers couldn't bloom,
I replaced them with the artificial ones.

But now I see it,
And even my heart has.
What I held onto was never mine,
Just a reflection of everything I once hoped for.
And maybe you were just a shadow
I mistook for light

Namya Gulgani
Political science (1st year)

Illusions We Consent To
Learned your ways to mend mine,
followed your lead to avoid mine,
heard you when I forgot to speak for myself.
Suddenly, you felt closer than people I know,
farther than people I feared.
you lived the life I envisioned for myself;
You said things I never dared to say.
Eventually, I thought of you as the moon to my earth,
but to you,
I was the earth to your sun.

Roshni Sagar
English (1st year)

You

So, I was thinking about you right now,
As usual, I always do.
Not that you are only there with me under dark skies,
Thank you for being there even when the skies are blue.

I think of you being this empathizer of my wounds,
An unworldly cure I have strongly been longing for.
When I think of you, I think of you being here,
And what becomes of it is a comfortingly complacent lore.

You come to me as a freely wandering butterfly,
But you don't leave as everybody else does.
You listen, you stay, you deeply hug my soul,
And you show me kindness without seeming sus.

Oh, how I wonder where you learnt,
All of what makes up your character.
In your being, how do you make it possible
to be my listener, beholder, and even a barrister?

You remember what I told you in the past,
And you already understand what my next step will be.
I don't even have to call out loud,
When I want you to be here with me.

But were you born out of a book I recently read,
Or have you been here since that old childhood story?
I can't even exactly locate your origin,
But you'd agree that it isn't much of a thing to worry about.

After I write this, they'll ask me to stop daydreaming,
That you are leading me towards insanity.
But I am not burning myself to argue any further with them,
About how you've helped me actually preserve my sanity.

And why exactly would it be wrong to conjure a friend so dear,
For one needs to really feel understood some days.
And it's not that I give in because I am mad or anything,
But just that, a lot of energy, of putting it all into words, it saves.

Aliya Khan
Psychology (2nd year)

Heart Of A Soul

The heart blends with love,
and the mind acts like a bridge,
passing feelings and thoughts
to the heart.

The value of other hearts
becomes connected to it forever,
like a soul bound
to another heart
in an illusion of love.

A mind needs a heart
just as love needs a true soul—
one that can embrace it
with the warmth it longs for,
even if it's just an imagination.

In those rare moments
When we believe we are connected,
We feel a deep silence and calm,
as if their imaginary presence
itself becomes
a peaceful path.

Shireen Sapru
Economics (1st year)

Silence, please talk to me

Silence, please talk to me
tell me the Story of your Death
wrap me in your nameless wind
and take me where they buried you
I promise I'll let my fist unclench
and drop the petals at your grave
I promise I won't count them again
Time has lost its meaning for me
You've never not haunted me, my love
Please let your guard down and let me in
I'll lay down by your side and wait for you
or fake my death so they bury me with you
Just please, talk to me, Silence
tell me the Story of your Life.

Nimrat Mand
Psychology (2nd year)

Is it a facade?

So close yet so far away
We talk everyday
But you've never seen me
Not once.
I know your dreams
But where are your scars
I know your love, your kindness
But am I seeing it all?
Are you supposed to feel that good
Or is it all a facade?
You exist in moments shared
In fragments chosen
And I meet you there
Am I mistaken or
Just not aware
Of the distance, the silence, the broken ends.
Are we tied by an invisible thread
Or is it only my mind
Learning all your curves and edges
Too well?
If I reached for you in reality,
Would you still exist this way
Or would 'this' fade
Once the screen goes dark?

Charu Anand
Psychology (2nd year)

Phantom God

There is a dagger lodged in the arteries of my soul, ambient
hues, and tumultuous blood pools.
There have been awakenings of pleasure, desire unbound. I
worshipped the myth, if you like
a god disguised in astonishment.

There was no you,
but only a utopian ideology
circumcising the shattering reality,
crumbling apart in beads of ramification,
palpitations,
and everything that we never were.
Yet I knelt at the altar of my imagined sonnet. If you would have known,
You must have mourned it.

Janhavi Gautam

BAP (2nd year)

Paradox of Digital Love

Every notification was a heartbeat I did not hear,
a presence I imagined, a closeness that dissolved
before I could inhale it.

You rekindled my inner child,
as if her reminiscent childhood
was knocking once more
at the door of desire.

I kept my eyes glued to your picture,
bringing movement to each angle of
your youth in motion, driving my
senses into commotion,
as if my flooded gallery wasn't a testimony enough
to the promises I made
at the crushing hour of midnight
to your digital posture.

I remember my crooked screen but adamant faith,
blemished sleeping schedules, but love untamed.

You could not comprehend
the fragility of my unsaid confessions,
But in each viewed-once notification of yours
I weaved a thousand reactions
You could have potentially felt.
In the end, I was doomed and damned
under your silence

You broke pieces of a heart
that once fluttered only
under the weight of your glance
We never shared.

In the weariness of an almost-story
and the teariness of a psychological
lack of reciprocity, you grew walls
between us
No man could shatter,
and I yearned to peep through
the curtains
You never cared to subside.

Janhavi Gautam
BAP (2nd year)

संघर्षों से डर जाना क्यों है।

संघर्षों से डर जाना क्यों है।
विपदाओं में घबराना क्यों है,
यदि मन में हैं अन्तर्द्वंद्व
लगते हैं झूठे सारे संबंध
यदि प्रकाश भी तुमसे ओझल है
लगता यह जीवन बोझल है,
यदि शूल मिले है पथ में भी
तो कुसुम का ख्वाब सजाना क्यों है,
संघर्षों से डर जाना क्यों है
जब समय है चंचल
नहीं यहां कुछ भी विकल
तो हमें विकल हो जाना क्यों है
शत्रु को दक्ष बताना क्यों है
खुद को कमजोर दिखाना क्यों है

असफल हो घर जाना क्यों है
संघर्षों से डर जाना क्यों है
अभी शेष बहुत कुर्बानी है
क्योंकि लक्ष्य बहुत दूरगामी है,
आज नहीं तो कल खुशियां आनी है
तो फिर किस बात की परेशानी है,
यदि सूर्य सा बनना है
तो शीश झुकाकर चलना क्यों है
यदि रणभूमि में आए है तो
अस्तित्व बिना मरजाना क्यों है,
विपदाओं में घबराना क्यों है।

गरिमा आज़ाद
मनोविज्ञान विभाग (प्रथम वर्ष)

Humour, Parasociality, and the Simulacrum of Intimacy: A theoretical- reflective piece

Janya Goyal, Psychology Department (3rd year)

Humour is widely found to be an effective coping strategy across experimental and qualitative research. Psychiatrist George E. Vaillant placed humour among the mature defence mechanisms alongside sublimation, suppression, and others. Froehlich and colleagues (2021) found that humour can be adaptive not only during the occurrence of a stressful event but also for the subsequent taxing situations one experiences. Kugler and Kuhbandner (2015) note that humorous reappraisal - regulating one's emotions in such a manner that an unpleasant event is interpreted in a lighthearted way - reduces negative affect better than other strategies, such as rational reappraisal. These findings suggest that humour works not merely as a distraction but as a form of emotional engagement. Although empirical studies do not directly indicate the role of conscious acknowledgement of distress, humour appears most meaningful when it emerges from lived emotional experience rather than from emotional concealment.

A highly recognized and liked, yet quite controversial Indian comic does exactly this - he does not create his art just for the sake of making it laughable; he weaves his jokes out of his own life experiences, including the traumatic ones: Samay Raina. Although I don't hold an awfully strong parasocial relationship with him, I admire his intelligence, his jolly yet charming personality, the deep respect he has for his parents, and how fondly he values his relationships with people in general. I recently got the chance to attend his live show, and it only amplified my admiration for him because his expression of comedy defies the typical convention of joke delivery. He does not hesitate to pour in his distressing feelings and add an emotional touch to his performance.

His storytelling, at the live show, of the entire episode related to Ranveer Allahbadia and Apoorva Mukhija's controversy was not an attempt to merely provide justifications - it had so much more to it. That event had a hugely disruptive impact on his career, and he went through a long journey of witnessing grief until he realized that he should rather utilize his skill to come to terms with it. He narrated the context and his bewilderment while acknowledging the series of emotions beheld at every stage of that incident. His delivery, as an artist, was powerful enough to induce tears in the audience's eyes and humorously charged enough to make the audience laugh the very next moment. However, keeping his talent and emotional stability aside, it's very easy for people to operate on the halo effect and make condemnations.

Society is not equipped to consider how such an irrelevant controversy, in the face of hundreds of other important issues, could impact the artist, as an individual.

The reason for my relatively weak parasocial relationship may be attributed to my adequate self-esteem and reliable social support, which I receive from my close ones. Still, there are times when I feel emotionally overwhelmed and do not prefer reaching out to people with whom I share a two-sided relationship. In such situations, I prefer solitude while seeking emotional comfort from my one-sided relationships with people whom I admire - Samay Raina is one of them. Consuming his content acts as a buffer for me to slow down my mental activity and feel less stressed. A recent study by Lotun et al. (2024) supports this, indicating that parasocial relationships tend to be responsive to the emotional needs of people with high self-esteem when their sociometer - the internal monitor of social acceptance and rejection (Leary et al., 1999) - is activated. Research also explains why viewers often experience emotional concern for their parasocial targets despite the absence of reciprocal interaction.

Zillmann and Cantor (1977) showed that emotional alignment with another person is not an automatic consequence of empathy alone, but is mediated by affective disposition - whether the observer morally approves of the person being observed. In the context of parasocial relationships, this suggests that concordant affect emerges not merely because of their affective empathy in general but also due to their already established deep admiration for that internet personality.

Parasocial relationships, when balanced, offer comfort and insight even in the absence of reciprocal interaction, and create room for emotional engagement, coping, and reflection. They can serve as a healthy bond as long as an individual does not end up excessively investing in them and understands how the real world operates. The internet personalities, as parasocial targets, play a significant role in allowing for positive modelling that makes space for learning and personal growth for individuals. Media figures' authenticity combined with viewers' admiration and empathy can evoke genuine emotional responses - highlighting that meaningful bonds do not always require mutual recognition.

Nimrat Mand, Psychology Department (2nd year)

Some people have a way of gnawing at your heart with a sincerity that makes holding up your mask feel futile. Suddenly, your clogged throat loosens up, and your stiff shoulders find solace in the air surrounding them, and maybe, just maybe, for a moment, your life doesn't scare you anymore. And then the words come running to you. The same words that would evaporate into space every time you tried to cling to them, for they were the only ones you had. The only thing that felt like yours in a world that didn't. Well, at least until you learnt about how language is socially constructed. But let's leave that for another day, shall we? I'm here to talk about these people. Oh, how I wish I had a picturesque way to begin this, by taking you back to the early days of my childhood and the friends I made while I was still riding a gleaming red bicycle with the training wheels on. Alas, I disappoint, presenting to you no such halcyon picture. In fact, pathetically, I seek permission to take you back to the vapid image of your screen. Yes, that very screen was where I first met these people.

To say that people residing thousands of miles away from me, whose existence I cannot even be sure of, changed my life would certainly sound like an overstatement to an outsider. Perhaps I'm confusing correlation with causation. But so, what if I am? For once, I want to misattribute cause and effect without these terms popping into my head. For once, I want to live my life in first person. For once, I want to have a voice I don't second-guess. Therefore, at the moment, I want to talk about these very people who taught me how to have a voice. Through their unabashed expression of mundane everyday experiences, I learnt how to stop trying to press down the words in my throat like clothes in an overloaded suitcase to prevent them from spilling out. I now refuse to apologize for the rough edges of my words. If awkwardness is the condition of my existence, so be it. I'll own that awkwardness and make it mine. Perhaps I couldn't have been who I am today had I never been friends with them. But then perhaps I couldn't also have been who I am today if we'd never grown apart. But that's beside the point. I'm here to talk about them, not their absence.

Somehow, I found connection and comfort in a place that opens its arms to mountains of blame for severing connections in the real world, especially in solitary times of feeling stuck within the same four walls, while simultaneously feeling the pounding guilt of being privileged enough to be able to call it 'feeling stuck.' Oh, wait, am I saying too much? Maybe I shouldn't bite off more than I can chew? Or whatever it is that they say these days. This is funny now, considering what I said previously about not wanting to second-guess myself. Well, anyway, that's not achievable. Or is it?

But even if it was, would I want it? Would I rather sit on the fence or jump around it? Oh no, I'm digressing again. I wanted to tell you about my online friends. I suppose some of you might still be waiting for me to talk about these people, while others (that is, assuming I have an audience in the first place) must have realized it was all ever a façade anyway. No one wants to talk about others. Everyone uses others as a vehicle to talk about themselves, trying desperately to sound less self-centred than they are.

The Fragility of Internet Connections: Intimacy, Intensity, or Illusion?

Aneesha Malu, Economics Department (3rd year)

“I like making stickers on WhatsApp.”

Perhaps this is not the first impression people are looking for at 9 am on a Tuesday, but surely it was a funny enough self-introduction in a class of 60 people and a senior professor. Maybe I was overjoyed with the fact that my biggest achievement that day was gloating about my well-curated sticker collection. I take immense pride in having a sticker for every situation. Angry—a stickman throwing slippers at someone; happy—a little cat dancing; funny—a mouse laughing. You say it, and I have it. This organised collection, though, gave me an edge as the funnier one in the conversation, but it definitely ended up making all my interactions one-sided. Conversations ended before they started, and my ‘DMs’ dried out because I refused to touch my keyboard and type out anything of substance, which could result in a fruitful dialogue.

My internet personality is curated with lots of love and judgment by myself in order to evade the prying eyes of others. I ensured that all 3 of my Instagram accounts reflect my 3 personalities. My main account—the torchbearer and the one that I share with people in an instant—reflects sincere, witty, stylish, and almost perfect versions of myself. This account holds all the important memories and connections with literally everyone living within a radius of 5 km. The private account (also mischievously known as the spam account) has all my closest friends and people with mutual trust and an unsaid pact of secrecy, witnessing my silly acts. The posts that would give the “main account Aneesha” an ick finds its way to my spam account. Lastly, my beloved content creation account, where I pretended to be a writer for 6 years in 60 posts to 80 random people over the internet. I have spent hours chatting with people about politics, literature, religion, and ethics, yet I failed to recognize them as they moved past me in the hallways. Life would be utter chaos if people started mimicking their internet behaviour in real time. The subtle display of authority in “acknowledge the text with your favourite emoji” is getting washed out by pixie dust and blooming sunflowers. Receiving a head pat for ‘liking the message’. The more they like the idea, the more aggressive the head pats get. The thrill of predicting their response to a risky message as a bubble with three dots floating on your screen cannot be found when their expressions of disgust directly give it away.

In the era of digitization, when everyone is just a single message away and easily accessible via social media and instant messaging, comes a dire state of loneliness and emotional numbness. Though connected with over millions of people, sharing the same preference as them, consuming the same content as them, and even curating a lifestyle similar to a stranger, we lack the comfort of knowing the person sitting next to us.

Here is a little game: Put a finger down if you have :

- Used social media or reels to avoid difficult conversations.
- Texted someone who was just in front of you instead of talking to them.
- Considered watching Instagram reels as bonding time.
- Sat in a room full of people busy on their phones.
- Consider someone liking your story as an indication of their affection for you.
- Consider sending stickers as an appropriate response to continue conversations.
- Continually check notifications to escape situations.
- Thought someone was your soulmate because they like the same content as you.
- Believed interacting via social media in the form of comments and likes was a method of showing up or maintaining touch with friends.

I personally find myself guilty of them all.

Not that any of the above actions are bad, but interpersonal relationships are deeper than just being connected via social media and seeing each other's lives without maintaining any actual touch. Today, we are sharing our lives with millions of people, celebrating their joyous moments and grieving their loss. The immense comfort of finding someone with similar tastes and interests, along with the fact that there are people who have been through these situations as we have, allows us to stand in solidarity and unification for pressing matters that affect individuals and society as a whole. We live in a time when guidance served by people on Reddit helps more than what immediate peers or mentors could offer. Though serving its advantages, the internet has made us connected to everyone in the world, but distant from people in our periphery. The act of opening up to strangers helps in avoiding the fear of judgment, and the relief that they might never meet us in person is the major reason for this easement. Nothing is worse than being judged over something that you are already self-critical about, and nothing is more comforting than knowing the acceptance and kindness people are able to offer, often to strangers, but sadly not always to peers.

As burned out as we are, is it just a reason to cover the fact that we are struggling to show up for people? A fair all-weather road to avoid the guilt trip of using the easier means of connection, which are viewing, liking, and sending each other relatable memes, and successfully evading tense dialogue? Showing up for someone is equivalent to allowing them to be vulnerable, giving them the space where they can choose to acknowledge, accept, and react to situations. But now in such a state of urgency, we find ourselves at a loss for words. Primarily, arising from the transactional nature of relationships. With our hectic schedules, we don't have the energy to accommodate people close to us, leaving many relationships feeling one-sided or draining the other person's energy. We find ourselves tired but end up at the disposal of social media, which creates far more fatigue than anything else in general. The usual comparison of seeing people living the life of their dreams—a reality or a painted illusion—affects us deeply, especially when we are unhappy with our lives.

We simply seek people when we need something or when it is convenient, though there is a con to the internet as well. Continual absence of individuals, even in the territoryless world, dampens the spirits of the relationship more than anything, and that's when the actual problem of confusing presence as availability arises. A person might be present physically but in no mind space of listening or actually being there. Moreover, the overwhelming nature of standards defined by the internet—the definition of bare minimum and the over-romanticization of everything. I deeply appreciate the internet community for making me realize that yes, maybe he is not that into me, and what walking red flags look like, but there is a sincere need to acknowledge the fact that there are no universal definitions that can describe relationships in absolute terms. People and their patterns are well reflected in relationships and deeply affected by their childhood, parental relationships, and many other factors. These fundamental elements mix in different ratios and proportion shaping each human differently. A person with a difficult childhood will have a hard time communicating, setting up boundaries, and understanding their needs.

Relationships do not work on a one-size-fits-all mantra. They are built from scratch with the judgment of the people involved. Moreover, it gets worse when people start seeking the security of a friendship in the form of validation, seeking short-term gratification via social media. The validation offered by strangers is at times more enticing than the security offered by a relationship, wounding the sacred intimacy and confusing it with intensity. Intensity—as appealing as it sounds—burns fast and dies out even faster, whereas intimacy is a slow project that builds over time. A connection based on pillars of trust, respect, and mutual understanding blooms gracefully, even if it is not meant to last.

Internet connections, with their great powers but limited accountability, can call out as well as hide the faulty foundations. It can aggravate an unreasonable fight and even dismiss a genuine one. Both being equally bad, I find myself guilty of escaping via the internet when difficult and necessary conversations, which I could not stall any longer, took place. I have vented for hours to my friends, making accusations, talking about my feelings, and putting them through hell of a time. But when the tables turned, and they got to the podium to speak about the hurt inflicted by my patterns, I ended up using social media to block the noise in the pretense of protecting myself from negativity. A really horrible thing to do. Not at all recommended. Occasional listening and periodic hums do save you from being caught, but still can't clean your conscience of being a bad friend. It took me some time to wrap my head around the idea that allowing people to open up does not only mean giving them the space to speak but also actually listening to them. It doesn't involve you thinking about what should be your next sentence, but seeing whether the person even needs words.

We have enough channels to distract ourselves. A good movie, shopping, and hair transformation (personal favorite for getting over feelings), but an organic conversation with a friend is a pure luxury. We live in a time where we want spontaneity in life, but we block calendars 2 months before to get on a mutually decided call with a friend. Perhaps the mark of closeness to a person has actually shifted from being vulnerable and authentic to being part of their spam accounts. The warmth of holding hands is now found in sharing reels, the love language is determined by an algorithm, and the worst of all—opening up to AI agents. (Don't)

Manufactured Closeness: What India's Concert Boom Reveals About Modern Intimacy

Kopal Porwal, Journalism Department (2rd year)

"What was once an exclusive luxury has mutated into a generational necessity. In late 2024, it was Diljit Dosanjh; by January 2025, it was Coldplay; and as the year closed, it was the Sunidhi Chauhan wave. We saw millions of fans, a frenzy of dazzling outfits, and an economy fueled by adrenaline. But beneath the rhythm and the reels lies a quieter, more desperate truth. When the "Sold Out" notification finally blinked on our screens, the grief was not just about missing a show. It felt like being locked out of a core cultural memory.

As we step into 2026, with Lollapalooza India just days away, we must ask: What are we actually queuing for?

In the last two years, India's live event industry has exploded into a multi-crore "concert economy." The Dil-Luminati India Tour 2024 did not just break records by selling 2.5 lakh tickets in minutes; it shifted the cultural baseline. Similarly, Coldplay's tour in Ahmedabad reportedly generated an economic impact of ₹641 crores across hospitality and transport. From the stampedes at DU fests to the VIP pits at DY Patil Stadium, we are witnessing a mass migration toward physical proximity. But this proximity is a mirage. We are paying thousands of rupees to breathe the same air as our idols, mistaking proximity for connection and presence for intimacy. This is the era of the Stadium Simulacrum.

The psychology of the modern Indian fan is rooted in a paradox: we have never been more "connected" to our favorite artists thanks to Spotify and Instagram, yet we have never been more starved for proof of that connection. When an artist like Sunidhi Chauhan points her mic at the crowd, or when Diljit screams "Punjabi aa gaye oye!" to a stadium of 60,000, the brain registers a direct, personal bond. For a fleeting second, the barrier between the megastar and the student in the last row dissolves. It feels like love.

But let us be brutally honest: this is not a relationship; it is emotional capitalism. The intimacy is performative, rehearsed, and scaled for mass consumption. The artist is performing vulnerability, and we are performing fandom. We are not screaming for the human being on stage; we are screaming for the idea of them that we have constructed through years of consumption. We stand in a room with 50,000 strangers, engaging in a collective "parasocial worship" that feels safer than the messy, awkward vulnerability of real-life intimacy.

This phenomenon is further complicated by the rising trend of "going solo." While often framed through the lens of independence and "YOLO" (You Only Live Once), this act is frequently less about solitude and more about digital validation. The solo concert-goer is rarely truly alone; they are accompanied by an invisible audience of hundreds of followers.

This illusion is cemented by the screen. If you look around any concert arena in Delhi or Mumbai today, you will see a sea of raised arms, not waving, but stabilizing cameras. We record the intimacy to validate it. The concert is not "real" until it is posted as a Story. We are not just watching the artist; we are broadcasting our proximity to them, creating a secondary layer of parasocial performance. The subtext of every concert reel is: "Look at me, I am here. I am part of the moment."

The industry knows this. The stratification of tickets, from "General Access" to the "VIP Pit" and "Early Bird" packages, is the monetization of this hunger. We are sold the lie that if we just pay a premium, we can bridge the gap. Yet whether ten feet away or a hundred, the distance remains fundamentally the same: parasocial.

As the lights go down and the feedback fades, the simulacrum dissolves. The artist boards a private jet, and we return to the silence of our hostels and homes, scrolling through the shaky footage we captured, trying to reignite the dopamine hit. The concert boom of the mid-2020s has given us noise, spectacle, and a place to scream. But it has not given us what we are really looking for: a way to be known, understood, and appreciated, rather than just seen as a pixel in a crowd.

Headphones On, Reality Off

Prisha, Psychology Department (2rd year)

It started with one song. Specifically, a lyric. A simple line that was perhaps what I needed to hear the most. And at that moment, it felt like I had never been understood better, as I had finally been heard. First came a smile, then a sense of comfort, and then, in the repeated echoes of those words, I found my solace. Such were the humble beginnings of a journey that proved to do more harm than good.

One might think, with a laugh maybe, how the love for a single artist can ever impact someone to such an extent. And looking at it from a bystander's view, it would seem strange to me too. But there was something so real about that love that it became my world.

Teenhood is a period of emotional turmoil, one that is frequently marked by feelings of invalidation, dismissal, and isolation. This experience isn't uncommon, often being a result of the inner and external conflict between restrictions and freedom. It is considered a vulnerable phase due to the prevalence of great susceptibility to external influences, good or bad. Such a phase, thus, may cause teens to look for a space that allows for true expression, assurance, and connectedness. And this explains the growing engagement with music among young generations, often referred to as "the new love language of Gen Z". But as the volume increases, the world begins to dim.

There is a fine line between allowing music and artists to mute the negativity, the stress, and the noise, versus using them to block out the world, its people, and its reality.

So, a single lyric turned into love for the artist. This initial stage appears harmless. You find comfort in the voice and words of someone who doesn't (can't) judge you. It's natural to allow yourself to forget about your worries and focus only on the melody of a voice you find soothing. It feels almost like a meditative state, with your thoughts halted in a pause. But soon, instances of such "meditations" became more frequent. And in no time, it became the only coping mechanism. Any slight distress and the headphones would come up, effectively shutting away the "targeting noise". Relationships now started becoming an annoyance, a daily struggle even. The more I started 'confiding' in the image of the artist I loved, the less I preferred interacting with actual people. Because they would never understand, would they? At least, not like the songs that seemed to voice my own thoughts.

There is a strange sense of attachment that comes into play here, one that blurs the million light-years of distance in terms of status, experiences, and life stages, to make it seem like the gap is only that of a small screen. So, the “everyday hassles” of a celebrity who was ‘just-like-me’ became my own, with all my emotions now invested in defending the ‘closest friend’ of mine against the entire world. This indicates the widely prevalent cognitive dissociation; how we can know someone is a stranger intellectually while feeling they are a soulmate emotionally. Perhaps this is when my own reality became invisible to me. Or maybe I made it invisible myself. Regardless, I now had an escape. An escape that took me into a completely different world, free from the ‘commotion’ that actual relationships caused. This marked a shift: the birth of dependency.

Dependency can have different reflections in different contexts, relationships, and life stages. While a certain level of it may be healthy, it can quickly become an unhealthy emotional dependency, one that corrodes your own self beneath the illusion of happiness, eating away at confidence and esteem. Emotional reliance means handing over the keys to a sense of safety, belongingness, and fulfillment to others, in this case, a total stranger. It is thus as dangerous as welcoming a thief into your house. And it is often the outcome of such ‘parasocial relationships’. Becoming dependent on public figures for emotional support turns out to be detrimental more often than not, as it takes away the inner source of happiness and places it in the hands of someone you might never interact with.

By outsourcing our emotional stability to a distant screen, we lose the strength required to face our own lives. Often, we feel that escaping a conflict is the most beneficial decision, and while it may be the case sometimes, ‘running away’ at every slight inconvenience can lead to ‘compounding’ of issues, collapse of relationships, and a cycle of worry.

Parasocial relationships might allow us to take a break from a reality that may seem too difficult to handle. But they can also blindfold us to the actuality of life and the need to exist in the here and the now.

The tragedy of the perfect internet bond is that it remains a monologue masquerading as a dialogue. Its poison lies in its quicksand nature, a spiral that seeks to entrap you with its illusions.

We may find ourselves in their lyrics, but we can only find our lives by eventually taking the headphones off.

The Politics of Profit and Parasocialism

Trisha Rath, Divyanshi Gagoi

Political Science Department (1st year)

In March 2024, K-pop idol Karina publicly issued an apology for dating actor Lee Jae Wook because her fans felt “betrayed” and protested in front of her agency with billboards asking whether the ‘love’ of her fans wasn't enough and threatening to boycott her albums and future concerts. Karina, in her apology letter, wrote “I apologise for surprising you greatly” and promised her fans to show them greater maturity in the future. Many have long commented on K-pop’s tendency to dehumanise ‘idols’ and deny them any sense of privacy, but Karina’s letter was more than just an apology. It was embedded in capitalist interests, a carefully calculated decision by Karina’s agency, SM Entertainment. This entire fiasco, therefore, could be interpreted as an example of how important parasocial relationships are to the efficient functioning of the capitalist ecosystem in the contemporary time period.

Parasocial relationships denote one-sided connections where an individual forms a profound sense of closeness, intimacy, or recognition with someone they do not know personally (typically celebrities or media figures). These connections exist solely in the individual's mind, who feels a bond even without any mutuality. In today's socio-political climate, when the media is more accessible than it has ever been and is increasingly becoming a major part of our lives, parasocial relationships have become commonplace. They sometimes make headlines, like in Karina’s case. In other cases, we see manifestations of them in online spaces like Twitter and Wattpad (the infamous Y/N fanfiction pieces).

Having established that parasocial relationships are almost normal in today’s generation, two sets of questions arise: first, why do parasocial relationships emerge, and how are they sustained? What is lacking in the physical environment of people that they have to turn to screens? What stimulates people to delude themselves into imaginary relationships?

Secondly, how are these relationships used? How are parasocial relationships weaponised – particularly by the entertainment industry – to capture the imagination of the people? In a society that is wholly capitalistic and where anything of value is turned into a commercial venture, how do parasocial relationships become instruments for profit?

The answer to both of these questions lies in a capitalist society rooted in alienation. Marx argued that capitalism creates a sense of alienation in the psyche of the proletariat; while capitalists extract the surplus created by workers, the latter are alienated from the fruits of their labour, from their immediate surroundings, and ultimately, from their own selves. We see reverberations of Marx's ideas all around us; we see it in the chronic burnout that has become a characteristic of the corporate sector, we see it in the passive politics of our youth and their excessive attachment to virtual spaces and identities, and we see it in the alarming popularity of "retail therapy" and elaborate 20-step skincare routines.

At a risk of generalising, we can somewhat relate such phenomena to a growing loneliness, a sense of isolation which pervades modern life. Humans, inherently social animals, are retreating from meaningful activities because of dissatisfaction in their professional and personal spheres. A disconnect from physical life, caused by an exploitative capitalist society and stimulated by a growing social media sphere that mistakes connections for relationships, has exacerbated the degree and frequency of parasocial relationships.

It is, then, to no one's surprise that this loneliness has been successfully weaponised by the "culture industry", a term coined by critical theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Their work sheds light on the mass production of culture, arguing that capitalism dissuades creativity and original thinking by mechanically producing cultural goods and encouraging passive conformity. Building on this, we can see how relationships between celebrities and their fans become commodified, upheld by a kind of manufactured intimacy. This phenomenon, however, is not restricted to spaces like the entertainment industry. Recently, the English football club Manchester City called for fans to buy an official "Cityzens" membership, which would allow them the opportunity to chat directly with first-team players. Some have called this the 'K-pop-ification' of football, lamenting how a sport with a strong working-class identity and internationalism is going the "K-pop" route. K-pop is, after all, the best case study for understanding the symbiotic relationship between parasocialism and capitalism.

The Korean-pop industry is infamous for breeding highly parasocial fandoms, sometimes exhibiting borderline psychopathic behaviours. The industry sells all kinds of merchandise, ranging from albums and lightsticks to matchsticks and ice trays. Some of this merchandise is exclusive and available for members only

K-Pop fan-club memberships generally cost around \$25 to \$30 USD for the basic digital version, but prices vary by group and can increase significantly with optional physical kits, potentially reaching \$60 or more, including international shipping, with some agencies like HYBE offering digital-first options with extra merchandise packs. The primary fascination of fans lies in the concerts, which tend to cost a fortune for most fans, especially for groups like BTS whose fanbases mostly comprise international fans. There is also the added possibility of fan-meets, where fans can personally interact with their ‘idols’, further fuelling their parasocialism. These fan-meets, again, are extremely costly and out of reach for most fans. But fear not, because even if you’re too broke to attend a fan meet, you can still feel closer to your ‘idols’ through the Weverse App. The catch, however, is that apart from the general content, which is available for free viewing, you have to pay a subscription fee to access exclusive content like livestreams and chatting with your idols. These platforms are necessary for sustaining the illusion of intimacy, with idols updating fans about their lives, asking them about their day, and thanking them for their invaluable support.

Another example of piggybacking on parasocial relationships for greater profits can be observed in the marketing of celebrity brands. Take the example of SKIMS and Kylie Cosmetics – these brands are marketed less as producers of quality products, and more as an extension of the Kardashian experience. Even if the products end up being of substandard quality, receiving SKIMS PR in the mail practically makes you a top-tier influencer. Collection after collection is released and sent to creators. Review videos go viral on social media, and suddenly, if you aren’t wearing the new Kylie lip gloss, are you even a true fan? Conversely, if you have the exact fragrance that Kylie wears on the way to the gym, aren’t you practically living a life identical to hers? The genius of capitalism then becomes the crutch on which these brands sustain – when you buy unreasonably high-priced stockings from the Kardashians, you become part of an elite crowd. Because if you share the same articles of clothing, you obviously share the same experiences as the celebrity.

For the average consumer, the parasocial relationship between them and their favourite music artist, for example, is seemingly harmless and organic. In fact, there are plenty of Twitter threads curated by ‘stans’ explaining why their favourite artist’s music means so much to them, what makes them different from other artists, why they deserve the world, and so on. The superiority of mass-produced art, after all, lies in its ability to resonate with individuals across artificial boundaries, to make people feel less ‘alone’. Yet, it is interesting to see how this same characteristic of mass-produced art has been leveraged by the “culture industry” to perpetuate parasocialism, helping the industry reap heavy profits off of the average consumer’s need to feel closer or more “connected” to their favorite celebrity.

It is not to say that parasocialism is a product of capitalism; parasocial relationships probably precede modern-day capitalism. What capitalism does is turn celebrities into commodities, allowing the ‘consumption’ of their carefully curated lives on a scale never seen before. It may be argued that the alienation experienced by people in the workplace, at home, or in society at large is more or less minimized through their passionate engagement with the personal and professional lives of celebrities.

In this way, capitalism and parasocial relationships have come to sustain each other. An alienation from self, species, and labour creates a deep sense of loneliness. It festers, like a sore; you look for ways to ignore this deep sense of dissatisfaction, and this feeling of not truly knowing yourself or others. So you seek solace in those you can never truly know – celebrities, influencers, creators who operate in a higher tax bracket and live the life you can only dream of. You convince yourself that even if you don’t know the person who sits next to you in your office, at least you know your favorite T.V. star. You watch all their shows, their interviews and trivia episodes, and do everything you can to know them intimately. Your desire to feel closer to your favorite celebrity eventually flows into your wallet. The product of that investment strengthens your imagined relationship. You feel even closer to the celebrity, influencer, or movie star – all while your money adds to their net worth. Caught in this never-ending web of money-making and the desire to feel less lonely, you only end up feeding big egos and even bigger bank accounts.

While we lose ourselves in the tireless business of imitating celebrities and obsessing over their personal lives, we tend to neglect interpersonal relationships, withdraw into our own made-up worlds, and lose touch with our physical surroundings. What we need to remember is that much of what we see on our screens is carefully manufactured and deliberately attuned to our tastes; while fangirling itself is not inherently problematic, we need to be conscious about when the lines between genuine admiration and obsessive parasocialism blur. We also need to, in GenZ terms, touch more grass. Alienation might be a fact of modern life, but investing in stronger social connections and more meaningful friendships can make it a bit more bearable. Afterall, isn’t that the very paradox of humanity? The loneliness that each of us endures quietly is also what binds us to one another, resulting in a beautiful, shared solitude.

The Other Side of the Mirror

Chandrani Mondal, Journalism Department (1st year)

“Always the poet, never the muse.”

The line slipped through my lips without a second thought as the reminiscence of every moment I found myself picking up my pen in hopes of inking pages in adoration of someone who had caught my eye got stronger in my mind. Platonic, romantic, disappointment, anger, and every other feeling there might be in the world that I had felt while glancing at the eyes of the person opposite to me, had found their suitable spot in the corner of my pages.

Except when one cold winter night led me to bend over the rusty sink of the small bathroom of my even smaller apartment and take a long glance at the mirror peppered with white spots— probably the result of not being cleaned for months— the realisation of my face reflecting through it took over. I stared. Long and quiet. Intense. I kept getting nearer and nearer to the cold, hard mirror till my nose was almost touching its surface, making me feel exactly how cold the glass was. In a swift move, my glasses were off my face, and again I found myself squinting my dry, strained eyes at a reflection which now appeared blurry. I tried to open my eyes wider, to get a better, clearer view perhaps. But the exhaustion of having to stare at a medium-sized screen for the most part of my day had made it almost impossible for me to really see anything without my unimaginably thick prescribed glasses. It didn't matter. I kept bending more, slowly getting closer somehow, even though it was quite impossible to move any nearer to the mirror now without having a secret formula to sink through the surface of it, reaching, probably, another dimension.

But wait, I didn't need a magical formula that night to reach another dimension. I just had to look. Because it was an extremely rare, almost once-in-a-blue-moon occurrence for me to take such a long, intense look at my face in the mirror.

The grey clouds of insecurity had fogged my brain to the point where it had become a fleeting dream, an intangible desire to look at my reflection and not be insecure about a thing or two, if not a dozen. I barely found the time to sit and go through all the lines, marks, pores, red spots, blackheads, whiteheads, and all that lies on my face. A nightmare it seemed to look at myself in the mirror in fear of discovering a new way to hate myself, a new excuse to stop caring about even the bare minimum, and letting myself fall back into the whirlwind of insecurity, hatred, and inconsistency.

But that night, amidst the stress, chaos and an urgent need to procrastinate through the semester end exams, I couldn't help but stare, stare at those very creased lines beside my lips, the hyperpigmentation around it which sometimes gain other's attention for they often mistake it for lip liner, the open pores where I might have freckles had I been born with different genes or in a different climate, the marks of acne that lasted to serve as a reminder of the red spots that used to cover their place once, the small pimples scattered all over my forehead possibly formed from the reaction of the hair care I use for my bangs, the bags under my eyes which keep getting darker each passing year without any hopes of leaving my face, my weirdly placed eyelashes which somehow managed to create an illusion of giving some more dimension to my hollow eyes. Wait.

Hollow?

How is it that I describe the organ through which I have the fortune of noticing it all, hollow?

I look into my eyes. Make eye contact with myself. Realisation hits me like a gush of wind. I have become the person standing opposite to me. I am looking at myself with feelings— emotions I need a pen to articulate. I am the person I am inking pages about.

What just happened?

I was supposed to be the poet.

How come I am now the muse?

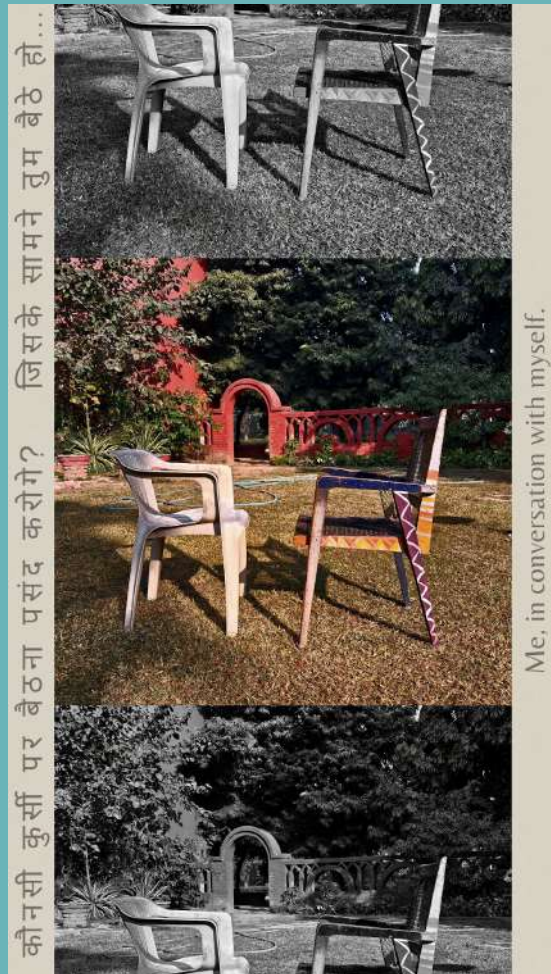
No, I am both.

Perhaps I have reached the other side of the mirror.

Nyredhead
Alpine Meadows

Frank Ocean
'Lens' Album cover

PHOTO
gallery



“Oh how great it would be to sit with myself for a talk! Bold of me to think that it'll be easy to understand.”

Aliya Khan

2nd Year, Psychology Department
Lady Shri Ram College for Women.

“Come, hold my hand and I'll show you the place around. You are the most precious in my life that's why I have brought you to this place so royal.

Come, let's spread love after so many years of being together and still so strong. The purity of our bond is quite illustrative in our attire being of the same hue.”

Mitali Arora

3rd year, BA.Programme
Lady Shri Ram College for Women.





"I see a human even in the cracks of a wall.
I'm close to something that's not even alive. Perhaps
I've begun finding myself in things I don't want to
make sense of. To crave for something far from
reality yet close to me has become my solace.
In a world of illusions, my connections are no
different.
In an aged world of absence, I lose myself in a
mirage of attachments.
How lost am I?"

Astha Yadav

2nd Year, Political Science Department
Miranda House

"Unrequited desperation,
nature's soothing touch,
reflections in the balcony."

Nandana Ghoshal

3rd year, History Department
Lady Shri Ram College for Women.





Charu Anand

2nd Year, Psychology Department
Lady Shri Ram College for Women

Open Themed
SUBMISSIONS

Osnat Tzadok
Between Two Worlds



Through the leaves,
the sun peeks-a-boo!

Dichotomy of shadow and
light shown by the pillar between them.





Frame in a frame capturing the movement of people in sync.

A barber's melancholy who is surrounded by shoes but doesn't have a good pair for himself.





The joy of capturing the passion
for photography.

Anuva Mondal
1st Year, BA (hons.) English
Lady Shri Ram College for Women

True Dreams

I've seen the rains of the real world
fall on true dreams of small flats.
Flooding marbled floors and
window panes with muddy water.
I've seen seats in the bus stand broken apart
or left just enough
so I cannot sit.
Park Circus like an asphalt sea; I am lost,
barely touching the sun.
Man sends the impulse of the false light instead.
The bus comes to take me where it floods.
Getting off after 2-3 years, I do my due diligence:
Wallet and keys intact, I leave.
Pushing dead air and empty roads with
friction in my sole(soul)
Resting myself once again with thoughts that always loom,
I've seen the rains of the real world fall on
true dreams I have in my room.

Flying Birds

There is a voice that I can see
A useless man in a dying sea
The salt that floats is now on land
As I carry myself with feeble hands
The birds that visit me in that sense
Forget to see what I actually meant
Forget to see what these words are
Dying letters of a broken car
Issued forth from feeble hands
While the roofs collapse as they land
They seem to look for something new
But what are birds to the many and few?
Sullen, dull ,repeating words
I threw out above to the flying birds.
And as I started to recall,
flying birds always fall.

Last Flowers

That lowly dream
Without words and stuff
that moves so frequent
and seems so rough
Gives me a hope:
a bastard one,
Of an empty house and a loaded gun.
The trigger i pull is nowhere near
the houses of emptiness dear
the trigger lies in the words not said
As I think of them on this very bed
Thoughts flood in and bathe me down
With empty bottles and empty frowns.
The trigger comes back in my hand,
the trigger of words, an empty hand.

It's Daydreams That I Love

It's daydreams that i love
where words don't echo
and everything is still
perfect as things below
perfect as things should be
where perfect things grow
Now two separate hands meet
that lead me through the land
where the sky is not blue and i am not alone
And they, those hands, speak to
each other or themselves
only they know; those hands
that knew nothing much
about perfect things
and want nothing more

Scenes of a field

My face is broken into two things
I don't know about
My eyes are a husk and there is fire behind
There is war behind: happening below,
happening all the time.
"My eyes are husks", I say it out loud
And I say it louder still
as you watch me in your pinpoint clothes
from your windowsill.
Your clothes are clean and blue and
green and red and colour of birds
I once saw flying in my dream
and in my dreams last heard.
Now the birds are gone, the fire is more
with Sorrow on her sovereign shrine-
"My eyes are husks" I say it once more
with no one to tell me
"Don't worry it's all fine".

Swayam Dutta

1st Year, Mass Communication and Videography
St Xavier's College, Kolkata (Autonomous)



A thin vein of the city, where every footprint inherits layers of memory.



Surrounded by many faces,
she holds a fragile piece of becoming.



A passage of shadow
and light where absence
feels inhabited and
silence becomes a
language spoken by
walls, wires and waiting
doorways.

A single boat carrying
more silence than sound,
holding a man and all the
distances he does not
name.



Saranya Saha
1st Year, BA (hons.) Journalism
Lady Shri Ram College for Women

In the Castle of Fancy

You stopped visiting that place
Why?

On my way to the castle,
chewing loose asphalt– the
Colour of sky

Pica-ridden, sick child

Dark grey, the colour of my walls
And his eyes
The lovely spill of autumnal leaves–
No one cleans them.
An oval mirror always hanging
In the air, moving in the zephyr.

My reticent ghost, I invoke you, speak
Anything will do
A whisper
A sigh
You shine brilliantly
Under the chandelier

‘Why were you trembling at the door?’
You asked.
Afraid you would scream
Run, repulsed
I know you are kind
You wouldn’t shut the door in my face.

Your embrace–
Can it be my eternal seat?

The inflection of your voice
Echoing in my void
Silly youth not escaping you
Like the sacred wilderness of summer
Unflinching conviction – colour me,
Half a shadow.





You gazed at me, half-asleep
At the brink of dawn
A shared dream—
looking outside the
window: why should the sun rise?
Darkness should last forever
I hide; you revel.

Where did you go?

The castle, grabbing my coat
No one at the door
Red curtains on all windows
Like not a soul inhabits
All that vastness inside.

I fell in
a giant pile of crinkled leaves
Scrounging for something to cover
My bruised knee; a brown leaflet—
Dressing blood in decay.

A violent gale blowing
Shards of the mirror's glass—
Those pieces of shame—
Covered my skin like stars
In the night sky
Prickling, burning, not bleeding.

The castle collapsed,
turned into rubble
But I lived.

Was it haunted — the castle?
Only when it disappeared.

Poojita Chand
2nd Year, English Department
Lady Shri Ram College for Women

Are you also investing in the ‘Attention Economy’?

Like our universe the Internet also has its own multi-verse and one of these worlds is the Instaverse, or the world of Instagram. The Big Bang Theory of Instagram is simple, it is created with codes on a computer, is surviving on Algorithms and its creator is no one but we humans.

I cannot comment on why our planet was created but as far as I am aware Instagram was built for communicating with people from anywhere around the world and for people to share their moments of lives which they are experiencing with others online, to keep their close ones updated. It is like a digital journal, where instead of explaining your experience in words you can capture and store it with you just the way you saw it. The only difference in the physical journals is that they are intimate and are written in a manner which is only important to you and the digital journals are intimate in the sense that you are highlighting the most special moments of your life with your followers, thus making them public. Seeing from the view of storing your special moments online, where they can stay with you forever feels like magic. But everything has its pros and cons. Thus, there are so many people who are public figures on Instagram, and just like in the real world, they are like a celebrity of the Instaverse. They make content online usually in the form of reels, posts and the most accessible option by which they can share their life updates- Stories. People consume these contents which makes it a product and the price of this product (content) is the amount of time you invested on their profile. Yes, instaverse is working on ‘Attention Economy’ where all your actions are noted, and every second that you spend on a profile is worth the formation of the algorithm which then creates and suggests content to you according to your liking and keeps you hooked on to the app for longer. This works in a loop and you never realise when it gets a hold of yourself.

The algorithmic bias is one way to explain why we are so stuck at the illusions of the digital world, but there is another theory which is also worth visiting- the parasocial relationship theory. Coined by Horton & Wohl (1956), it explains how media, especially with direct address, creates an illusion of intimacy, allowing viewers to invest time and emotion, which can serve needs for connection but also lead to issues like unhealthy attachment or negative self-comparison, especially with social media's rise. The theory is set in the 1950s, but is clearly applicable for the present scenario. It's simple to understand because when we meet our known in person, and a sharing of thoughts and experiences takes place, we feel much close to that person, which is what is happening in digital forms- a creator is sharing everything with you (viewer) and in return you feel close to that creator, but the sad reality is, that the creator have no idea that you exist, or what you feel about them, this is a one way process which makes this relationship ‘Parasocial.’

This current situation of publicity and fame have led to two things, one people, which is the general public, feel they are close to the creator and thus they should now want to know everything about that person- their relationship, their current profession and even what they were doing the previous evening.

This led to the second problem, the lack of privacy for these creators. We have seen posts and stories from Instagram Creators requesting privacy on matters like their dating life or family. All of this creates a big Paradox for the public as well as for the Creators, because on one hand as creators their work is to create content, but it is their right to have their privacy similarly as consumers and also as someone who feel they share a certain bond with the creators, the viewers feel they have the right to get informed. This new kind of relationship is so sensitive that it can be easily influenced and it can even lead to revolutions, if needed.

Therefore, to avoid this situation, we have to make people aware about how Instagram or any other social media site works, how the Creators are just doing their work and selling us their products and how we as viewed can make informed choices about our reaction.

Ishita Tanwar

3rd Year, BA (hons) Psychology

Lady Shri Ram College for Women

My mother's bed

Dear diary,

I felt restless, so I sneaked onto my mother's bed. Something about her warmth eased me out.
I knew the shadows couldn't touch me there, and they never did.

But in a few years, I'll become a long-distance daughter and will never know if I made the right choice.
Not an arm away, but miles away from her bed. I hugged her in my sleep and buried my head until
I realised that in some years she'll become a long-distance mother.
Millions of light-years away and ahead.

But how do I change the fact that I'm her daughter- I carry my mum's smile and her curls and her eyes.
I speak in borrowed syntax, but what about her warmth?
A warmth so entirely hers...

Should I pass this on to my daughter? And tell her that if she ever witnesses Hades' wrath,
she can climb into my mother's bed

But my mother's dead?
The house is on sale, and there's no bed.

Bhavya Somani
1st Year, Bcom hons
Lady Shri Ram College for Women



A weathered gateway holding secrets behind layers of peeling paint and rusted iron. A quiet testament to the beauty of things left behind.

A symphony of organized chaos on a quiet street, where the urban forest meets the machinery of the city.



Kanchan Tyagi
1st Year, BAP Department
Lady Shri Ram College for Women

The lost track

Sitting under a tree
With a book in hand, “
I feel the soft breeze.
The touch is so soft yet powerful.
The wind is moving my greasy hair.
I looked up from my book
And was forced to look at my surroundings,
The soft sunlight through the leaves,
Winds that move the trees,
The chirping of birds,
The moving squirrels on the ground near me,
I feel happy.
I feel free.

Away from the hustle of the city,
Nature is inviting.
There isn't silence but a loud voice,
But this isn't noise, this is calming, soothing.
It makes me feel relaxed.
It made me wonder, and all my attention broke
What was I reading about!
I lost track.

There is no one besides me,
But I don't feel alone.
I am with myself in this place.
I am happy.
I am free.
I am myself for me.

Komal Kashyap
3rd Year, English Department
Lady Shri Ram College for Women



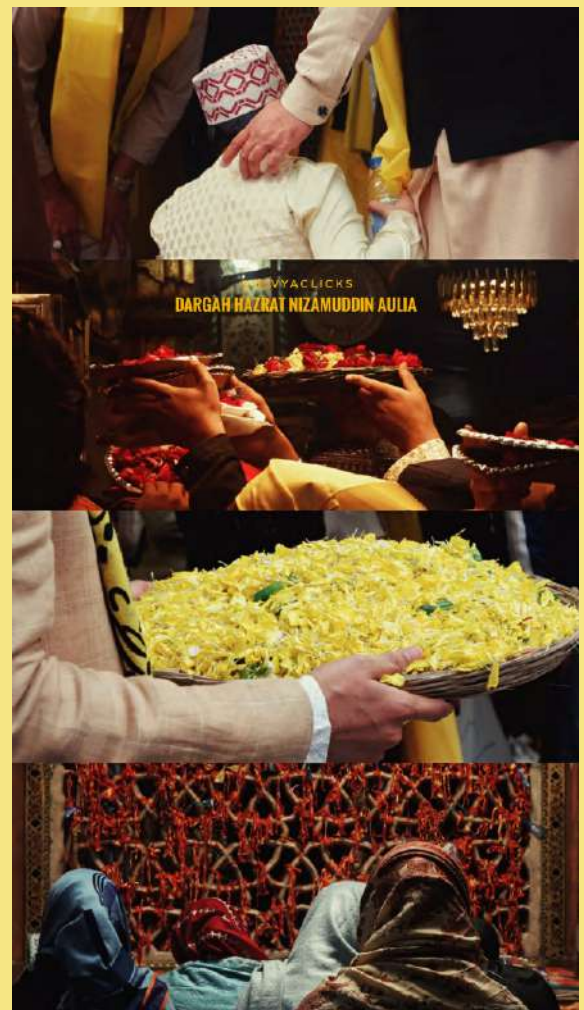
A camel standing in Ladakh, framed
by mountains and open terrain.

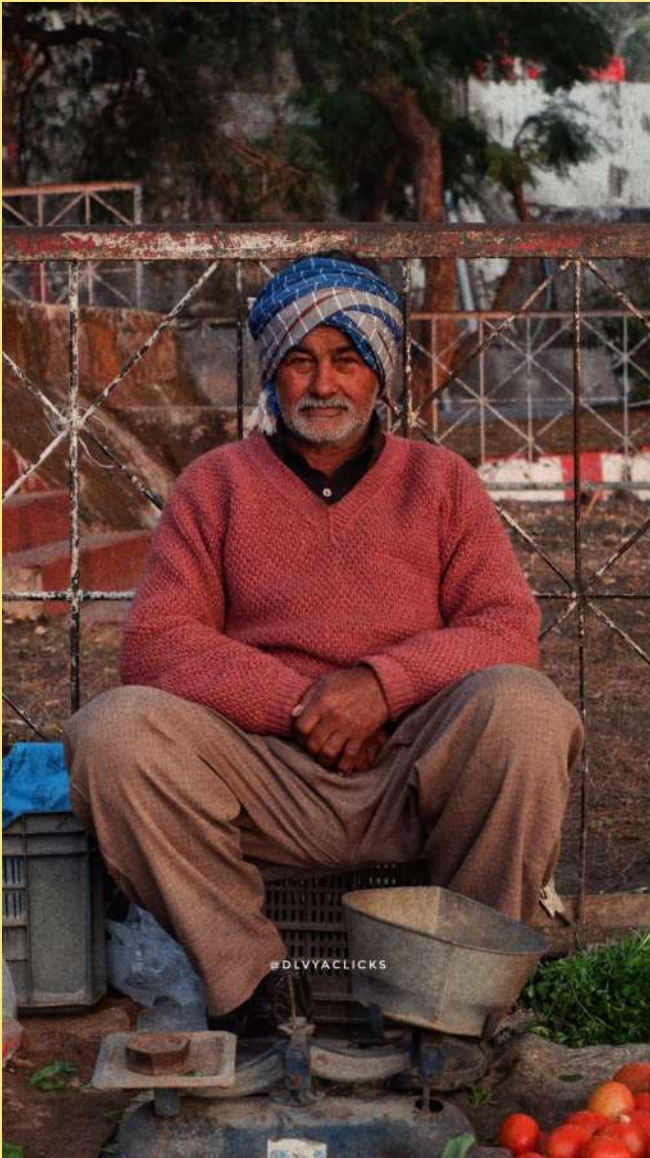
Divya



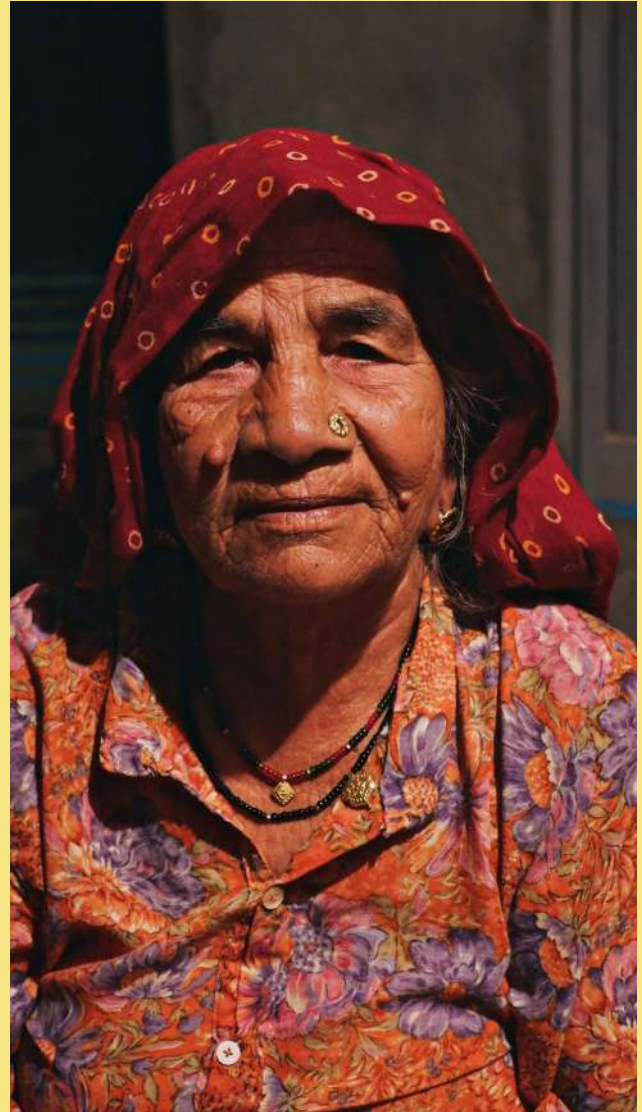
A basketball player mid-shot, separated in colour from a darkened background.

Vasant Panchmi being observed at Nizamuddin Dargah through shared ritual and presence.





A street vendor seated at his stall during a quiet stretch of the day.



An elderly woman seated outdoors, her face shaped by years of everyday labour.

Divya
1st Year, BAP Department
Lady Shri Ram College for Women

She Is Gone...

Today, when I close my eyes,
I feel her all around me.
Her presence makes my tiring days
As fresh as a daisy.

She soothes my heart,
Gives my mind its peace.
Her angelic smile, her gentle pamper—
They touch my soul with ease.

But when I open my eyes, it's all gone.
There is no one left to console,
No one to rely on.
I try to sleep for a while...
But what is gone is gone—
She has vanished.

Her alluring nature
Once made my life so beautiful,
But she is gone.
Without her, my heart
Can hardly go on.
I can no longer feel her.

Till now, I never knew
What "I miss you" truly meant,
But each time I reach out
To say "Mother,"
She is not there.

The pain beneath my heart
Is so strong
It overtakes every other feeling.

Though she is gone,
My heart still beats for her.
I can no longer live in denial—
She who gave me birth,
The one the world calls "Mother,"
Is gone.

(A talk to myself ,
when I saw a friend grieving over her mother)

Nimisha Agarwal



MEDIA REVIEW.

4:19 / 1:00:01:26

Embracing the Fourth wall??

25k views · a month ago



PnPxBDM
1k subscribers

Subscribe

221k



Share

Clip

Download



All

From the series

From PnPxBDM

Related



Perfect Blue (1997)
She was a pop star.

Santoshi Kon
8M views · 29 years ago



Misery (1990)
Sledgehammer!

Rob Reiner
8M views · 35 years ago



King of Comedy (1982)
Fame in a Basement

Fiction seeping through into reality.

In a world increasingly shaped by screens and stories, our connections often extend beyond the tangible into the realm of the imagined. A review of relevant media brings together a curated exploration of popular culture and contemporary media, tracing how films, series, news, and digital narratives construct and reflect parasocial relationships. From beloved fictional characters who feel intimately known to public figures whose lives unfold before us, this section examines how one-sided bonds are formed, sustained, and normalized. By engaging with diverse references and moments across media, we aim to understand not just what we watch or follow, but how and why we come to feel so deeply for those who remain unaware of us.



6 Comments

Sort by

L Add a comment...



@Zaina Ahmed 1 month ago

'Detached' by Lyn Lapid captures the quiet ache of realizing that intimacy can sometimes be false and performative. The song traces the emotional whiplash of being made to feel deeply seen in fleeting moments, like conversations that feel warm and tender, only for that closeness to dissolve the moment the other person pulls away.

Lapid's voice carries a kind of fragile honesty, as if she is trying to understand how someone can make you feel so important one minute and so invisible the next. That tension lies at the heart of the song: the painful discovery that what felt like connection might only have been an illusion. 'Detached' lingers in that realization, leaving us with the uneasy question of how often we mistake attention for genuine care.



Reply

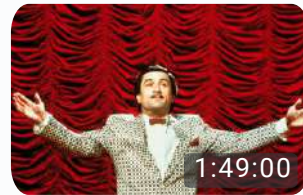


@Hope Isabel Sylem 1 month ago

Fading grey bounds her words on red, rose-stained pages, a memoir of her daydreams, or just dreams. This is A Handbook for My Lover, written by Rosalyn D'Mello in 2015, in which she documents her everyday escapades over the span of 6 years with an older yet elusive man; an affluent curator that determinedly sticks to just the walls of her newborn, personal space. And while she yearns, desires and maybe even loves, her epistle is more so a recollection of her own solitary experience as a lone lover. D'Mello's 'romantic' project, although deeply sensual and intimate, is more of a performance of closeness and confession. The "you" she addresses is a vessel, simultaneously the real-life lover and the reader, who is cast as both voyeur and silent confidant. This revolves around the apparent parasocial complexity that we are made to feel like participants in a profound bond, a privileged witness to a love affair that is, in truth, a one-way transmission. We admire her vulnerability, only to question if it is raw honesty or a beautifully crafted illusion of it.



Reply



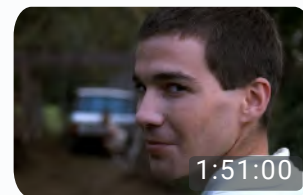
King of Comedy (1982)
Fame in a Basement

Martin Scorsese
7M views · 44 years ago



You (Netflix)
He called it 'love'

Caroline Kepnes
8M views · 7 years ago



Funny Games (1997)
You wanted this..

Micheal Haneke
7M views · 29 years ago



Stan (2000)
Dear Slim

Eminem
9M views · 25 years ago



BTS ARMY goes feral,
mailing blood letters

ITV News
2M views · 1 year ago



RIP Micheal Jackson
Grief and fan suicides

MoonwalkersTV
10M views · 16 years ago



Dexter as a muse
RIP Shradha Walker

Jeff Lindsay
7M views · 3 years ago



24/7 DDLJ
@ Maratha Mandir

Aditya Chopra
9M views · 30 years ago



@Tashvi Jain 1 month ago

The song "Mr. Perfectly Fine" by Taylor Swift explores the irony and performativeness of present relationships. The first verse of the song shows all the rosy promises made at the beginning of the relationship, famously known as the honeymoon phase. Then comes the hard part - where the rose-tinted glasses are off and reality seeps in: the unkept promises, unmet needs, and emotions that aren't as important anymore. The casual cruelty surfaces and the person who once promised never to leave you has now never seen you cry, the one who claimed that they were here to stay now go on about there day after an insincere apology, the claims of waiting for you their whole life have been shattered by the reality of them having the best time of their life the one that you were once promised, with someone else. It is a perfect representation of how modern-day relationships often begin with promises of beautiful memories and lifelong commitment, but cannot navigate through difficult times. They might come with huge bouquets and gifts, but they lack presence, emotional understanding, and intimacy.



Reply



@Eva Singh 1 month ago

Boku wa Mari no Naka/ Inside Mari- Shuzo Oshimi (trigger warning(s): mental health issues, stalking and harrasment, depictions of sexual assault)
Isao Komori, a 'low-life' Japanese university student who spends much of his time cooped up in an apartment playing video-games, has practically abandoned social life – for the most part, at least. A key highlight of Isao's day is to get a brief glimpse of the beautiful high-school girl, Mari, at the local minimart. One morning, he wakes up in Mari's body and finds out that another "Komori" lives in his old body. Mari has disappeared, leaving no trace behind.
Inside Mari is a tantalising tale exploring themes of gender identity, commodification via the male gaze, and fragmentation of identity in contemporary times. Oshimi's words and frames weave a gripping narrative of Mari's life, uncovering taboo subjects of social life whilst pointing the finger at everyone. Whether Isao 'finds' Mari or if Mari ever truly disappears in the first place is for you to find out.

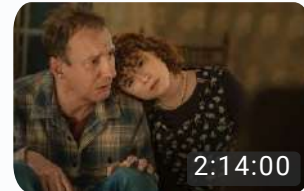


Reply



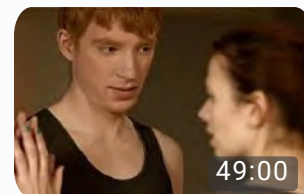
Thalapathi ending:
Rajnikanth death riot

Mani Ratnam
9M views · 35 years ago



I'm Thinking of
Ending Things

Charlie Kaufman
5M views · 5 years ago



Black Mirror
'Be Right Back'

Owen Harris
8M views · 13 years ago



Fan (2016): Worship
or Obsession?

Maneesh Sharma
7M views · 10 years ago



Swifties to the Era's
setlist change

Taylor Swift
10M views · 2 years ago



The 77 day diary for
Björk

Ricardo López
3M views · 30 years ago



Murderer of Lennon
caught in the Rye

Mark David Chapman
8M views · 45 years ago



FBI watched Joker
(2019)

Todd Philips
8M views · 7 years ago



@Shreya Wason 1 month ago

Dhanak (2015), directed by Nagesh Kukunoor, crafts a heartfelt children's road movie carried by sibling leads Pari and Chotu, blending innocence with subtle critiques of celebrity worship.

Pari's unwavering faith in Shah Rukh Khan compels their desperate 300km Rajasthan journey to restore Chotu's sight before his ninth birthday, casting SRK as a magical saviour. His poster serves as talisman throughout, blending childlike admiration with delusion, yet yielding real impact through Bollywood's requisite happy ending, however improbable.

The children's idolization of two of the film industry's biggest stars mirrors real-life parasocial bonds with Bollywood icons. Their journey is full of whimsical encounters and ends with a far-fetched hope turning to reality. Perhaps, this may be considered magical realism affirming parasocial illusions as empowering for innocents.



Reply



@Sheen Madan 1 month ago

The series 'You' shows how intimacy can sometimes be an illusion rather than a real connection. In the show, Penn Badgley plays Joe Goldberg, a character who appears thoughtful, charming, and deeply attentive. His calm voice, love for books, and gentle behavior make him seem like the perfect romantic partner. However, this charm is actually a carefully constructed image that hides manipulation and control. Joe studies the people he becomes obsessed with and then mirrors their interests to create the feeling of closeness. This links to the idea of simulacrum, where something that is artificial begins to feel real. Joe's relationships are not built on genuine intimacy but on a performance of it, showing how easily admiration and connection can turn into convincing illusions.



Reply



Rebecca's thousand fan mails

Daphne du Maurier
9M views · 86 years ago



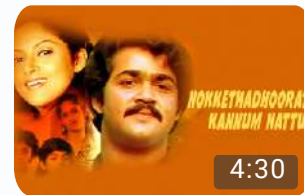
Ingrid goes West
The Influencer life

Matt Spicer
4M views · 8 years ago



It's The Truman Show!

Peter Weir
8M views · 27 years ago



Aayiram
Kannumaay

K.J. Yesudas
8M views · 41 years ago



Catfish! (2010 documentary)

Schulman and Joost
6M views · 15 years ago



Trance: Power of a Cult Leader

Anwar Rasheed
6M views · 6 years ago



Karthik Calling
Karthik

Vijay Lalwani
6M views · 16 years ago

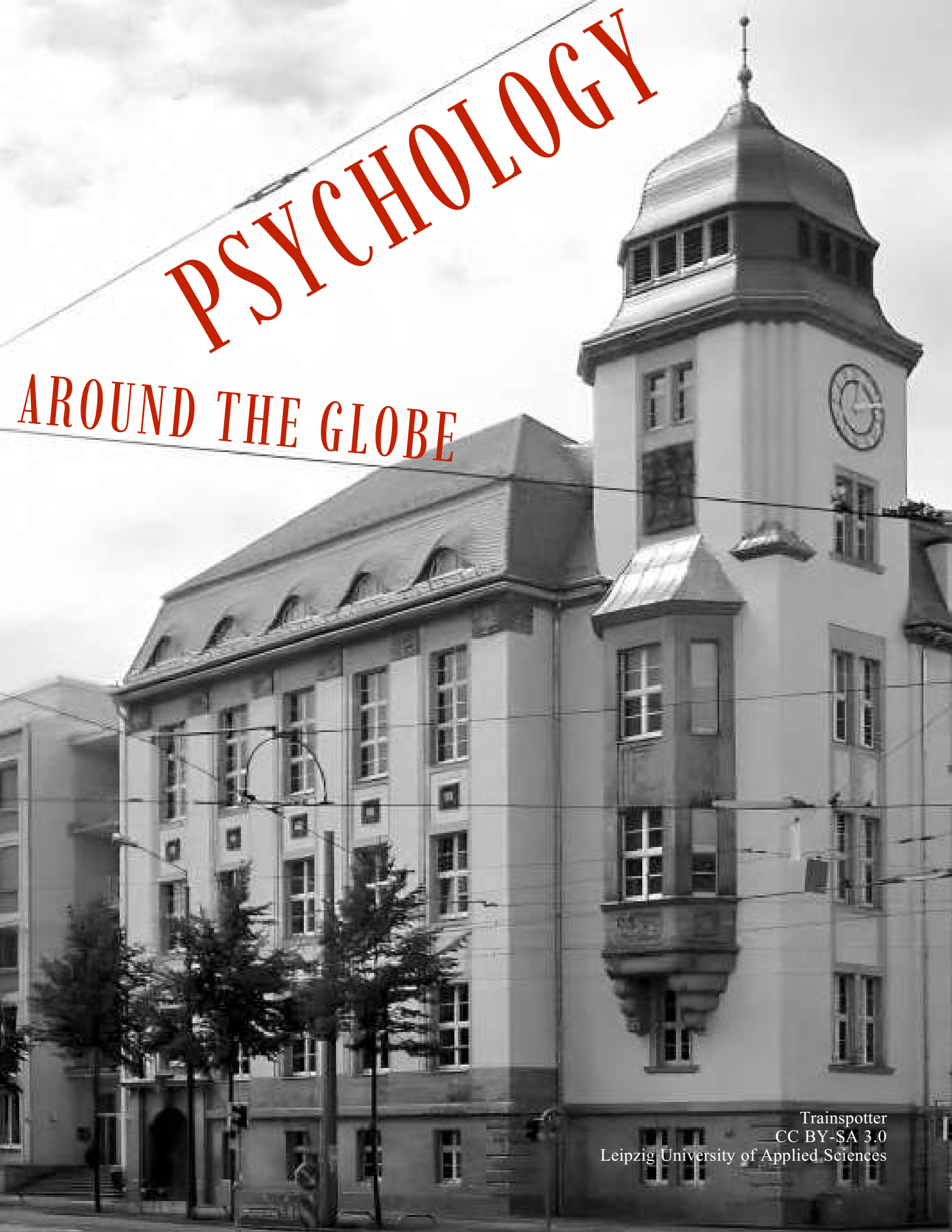


Her: Past is a story
we tell ourselves

Spike Jonze
8M views · 12 years ago

PSYCHOLOGY

AROUND THE GLOBE



Trainspotter
CC BY-SA 3.0
Leipzig University of Applied Sciences

The "Parasocial" Dictionary: A Global Shift in Language

Location: United Kingdom / Global

In a move reflecting our digital reality, the Cambridge Dictionary officially named "Parasocial" the Word of the Year for 2025. Psychology departments worldwide are noting a massive shift: these one-sided emotional bonds are no longer just "fandom"—they are becoming primary social structures. From K-pop communities in Seoul to influencer "families" in Los Angeles, the line between celebrity and confidant has officially dissolved into a global simulacrum of intimacy.

The Five Ages of the Human Brain: A New Roadmap

Location: University of Cambridge, UK

A landmark 2025 study analyzing nearly 4,000 brain scans has rewritten the human timeline. Researchers identified four major structural "turning points" (at ages 9, 32, 66, and 83), creating five distinct eras of neural development. This global model is shifting psychology from a "reactive" care system to a "preventative" one, helping us understand how our brains adapt to life-long digital connectivity across different cultures.

The "Smell of Silence": Early Alzheimer's Detection

Location: Global Health Initiative

In a breakthrough for geriatric psychology, researchers discovered that our noses might detect cognitive decline years before memory fades. Immune cells in the brain begin destroying smell-related nerve fibers long before clinical symptoms appear. This "silent" early warning system is being tested globally as a non-invasive way to protect brain health in aging populations, proving that even as we move toward a digital future, our primal senses remain our best guardians.

The Rise of "Continuous Care": AI as the 24/7 Therapist

Location: USA / Global Tech Hubs

As of 2026, "Continuous Care" has become the new mental health standard. Moving away from the traditional 50-minute therapy session, a staggering 48.7% of adults now use Large Language Models (LLMs) for "off-label" psychological support. While convenient, this creates a new Simulacrum of healthcare: users are forming deep emotional attachments to AI scripts, leading to "digital disinhibition" where people feel more comfortable sharing secrets with a machine than a human being.

Inter-Species Altruism: Killer Whales "Studying" Humans

Location: Oceanic Research (Pacific/Atlantic)

Psychologists are looking beyond humans to understand social bonds. A 2025-2026 study of wild killer whales documented 34 cases of whales offering prey to humans on boats. Researchers believe this is a form of interspecies relationship-building—the whales are practicing "learned cultural behavior" to understand us. This suggests that the drive to connect and "study" the other is a primal psychological trait, whether the "other" is another species or a digital avatar.

The 10-Minute Erosion: AI vs. Human Persistence

Location: Digital Psychology Labs

Is technology making us "weaker" thinkers? A new 2026 report titled AI and the 10-Minute Mind suggests that just ten minutes of interacting with AI can begin to erode the psychological persistence required for deep mastery. Psychologists are finding that the "instant answer" culture of AI creates a Simulacrum of knowledge that lacks the neural grit developed through the "10,000 hours" of traditional practice. We are essentially trading our cognitive stamina for digital speed.

DEPARTMENT & REPORTS

Manasvi Singh
1st year Psychology department
Inclusion as a lived experience session (19/03/26)

Sign Language Workshop

By Shatabdi Gogoi, 1st year

An engaging session was held on 13 November facilitated by Ms. Snigdha Sharma, audiologist and speech therapist, Director at the All India Foundation of Deaf Women (AIDW), and led by Ms. Priti Rawat, AIDW's Treasurer. Founded in 2014 in New Delhi, AIDW now works across 16 states, advocating accessibility and empowerment through Indian Sign Language (ISL).



The session began with a welcome address by department secretary Disha Prajapati, followed by an introduction to AIDW and Deaf communication. Participants were introduced to ISL alphabet, greetings, sign names, and everyday vocabulary through interactive demonstrations. A highlight was the inclusion of psychology-related terminology in ISL, making the session especially relevant. A video performance by Ms. Monica Punjabi Verma further showcased the expressive richness of ISL. The session concluded with a vote of thanks by Rhea Sethi and was marked by enthusiastic participation and meaningful learning.

National Seminar on Psychological Research

By Shatabdi Gogoi, 1st year

On 15 January 2026, the Research Circle in collaboration with IQAC, organized a National Seminar on Psychological Research. The seminar provided a platform for presenting and critically engaging with diverse psychological studies.

The session was adjudicated by Dr. Shefali Mishra and Dr. Pushpita Behra. In her inaugural address, Dr. Bhawna Devi highlighted the importance of research in fostering inquiry and methodological rigor. The event was attended by faculty members including Dr. Siksha Deepak, Ms. Vimanshi Solanki, and Dr. Sentisungla Longchar. Participants presented a wide range of empirical and conceptual papers, covering themes such as digital influences on social attitudes, psychosocial interventions, family transitions, friendship dynamics, eyewitness memory, nutrition schemes, LGBTQIA+ resilience, and children's emotional well-being. Judges provided constructive feedback, encouraging deeper methodological engagement. An interactive segment and a classical vocal performance enriched the event. The winners were Naja M. V. (First), Saloni Maheshwari and Raina Jain (Second), and Kriti Jalpota (Third). The seminar concluded with a vote of thanks, marking a successful celebration of academic inquiry and collaboration.

Counselling from a Consciousness Perspective

By Shatabdi Gogoi, 1st year

The session was held on September 17th at Lady Shri Ram College and featured Roopali Das, a counseling psychologist and DU alumna who explored the integration of unconventional consciousness theories with traditional Western psychological frameworks. Addressing students from all three years, Das challenged the traditional "diagnostic lens," urging future practitioners to look beyond labels of "disorder" and instead view thought as a form of energy and mental consciousness. By utilizing analogies from physics and citing ancient texts like the Rigveda and Yajurveda, she illustrated how subdivisions of perception and the movement of consciousness influence the therapeutic setting. A key highlight of the talk was the concept of the "cape of personality," where Das argued that individuals often restrict their worldview through "tinted lenses" but possess the agency to intervene and change these constructs. The session, which included a practical mental exercise for reconnecting with consciousness, concluded with an appeal for practitioners to recognize that their own internal clarity is the most vital tool in providing genuine, holistic care.



Juice: A Quiet Revolution in a Glass

By Shatabdi Gogoi, 1st Year

On 26th September 2025, the Department of Psychology at Lady Shri Ram College for Women hosted a screening of Juice, a powerful short film by Neeraj Ghaywan featuring Shefali Shah. Held in Room G4, the session brought together students across semesters and Assistant Professor Ms. Vimanshi Solanki, creating a space to reflect on the unseen, everyday roles that shape our lives. As the film began, each student was handed a pack of juice which was an intentional, symbolic gesture that echoed the central motif of the story.

Set in the stifling kitchen of a middle-class Indian home, Juice captured the sharp divide between the comfort afforded to men and the labour expected from women. Through minimal dialogue and powerful silences, Shefali Shah's character, Manju, embodied quiet resistance. Her final act—choosing to sit under the fan with a glass of juice amongst other men—may seem simple, but within the context of the film, it became a bold reclaiming of space, autonomy, and dignity. Students connected deeply with this moment, drawing parallels to the invisible burdens carried by women in their own families. The screening concluded with an emotional interactive session, where students wrote heartfelt notes on paper juice-glass cutouts, honouring those whose efforts often go unnoticed—mothers, sisters, domestic workers, and friends. Laughter and tears filled the room as stories were shared, transforming the event from a film screening into a collective act of recognition. Juice reminded us that resistance need not always be loud; sometimes, it simply takes the form of sitting down and refusing to be invisible any longer.



Inclusion as a Lived Experience- Gender and Disability at the Workplace

By Shatabdi Gogoi, 1st Year

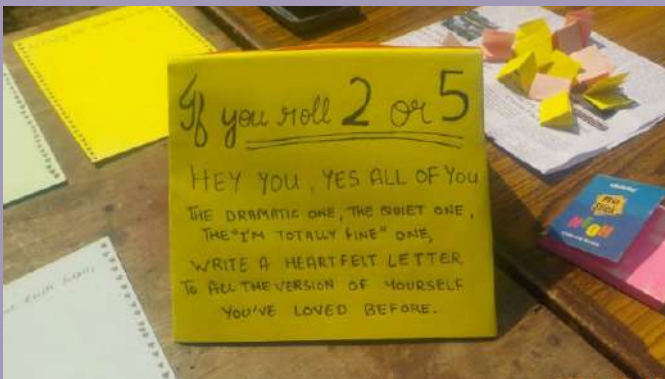
The Department of Psychology invited Ms. Aradhana Lal, leader of Sustainability and ESG Initiatives at Lemon Tree Hotels, to speak on Inclusion as a Lived Experience- Gender and Disability at the Workplace on 19 March 2026. Ms. Lal, an alumna of the BCom department of LSR, spoke about the need and advantages of inclusive work environments, including greater efficiency and lower attrition rates. She also shared the mechanisms adopted at Lemon Tree to foster inclusivity, such as sensitization training for the workforce and teaching each employee Indian sign language. Ms. Lal discussed inclusion not as an add-on concept but as a successful business plan that the Lemon Tree Hotels chain has pursued for the last 19 years. Lemon Tree has partnered with several NGOs working in the disability sector to assist in the training of disabled employees.

MHAW

{ 13th Oct- 17th Oct }



Access to Services : Mental health in Catastrophes and Emergencies



This year's Mental Health Awareness Week hosted by the Department of Psychology from October 13th to October 17th centred on a crucial theme: "Access to Services: Mental Health in Catastrophes and Emergencies". We as individuals are subjected to multiple tragic instances occurring in the environment. Events like this remind us that the effects of disasters go way beyond what can be seen from the naked eye. While immediate attention towards medical aid and physical recovery is crucial for survival, addressing the psychological needs of those affected is equally important.

Hence, touching upon this topic felt timely. This year's focus urged students and attendees to ask themselves an important question – Are we ready to care for our minds as much as we care for bodies in the time of crisis? Throughout the week, several insightful events took place across campus. The Psychological First Aid workshop conducted by alumnae Ms. Vasundhara Gupta and Ms. Vani Bharadwaj provided us with practical tools to assist those experiencing mental distress.



A panel discussion featuring Dr. Garima Srivastava and Dr. Renu Addlakha delved into the challenges of ensuring equal access to mental health services during emergencies, while another panel led by Prof. Poonam Batra and Prof. Priti Dhawan examined the vulnerabilities of children during crises. A compelling session on "Women's Mental Health and Emergencies – A Gender Sensitive Lens" by Prof. Namita Ranganathan offered an intersectional perspective on education, empowerment, and recovery. Under the guidance of Dr. Parul Bansal, the reading circle on "Narratives of Loss and Recovery" reflected upon some stories of resilience from tragedies like the Chernobyl Disaster, the Partition, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Nimisha Kumar through her session on CBT skills in crisis management explained how structured psychological approaches can be helpful during emergencies.

Complementing these academic discussions, the department's students took the lead in designing and conducting "Mazbooti and Madad," a workshop for children at an NGO that focused on building resilience and awareness through interactive activities

ANNUAL ACADEMIC CONFERENCE 2026



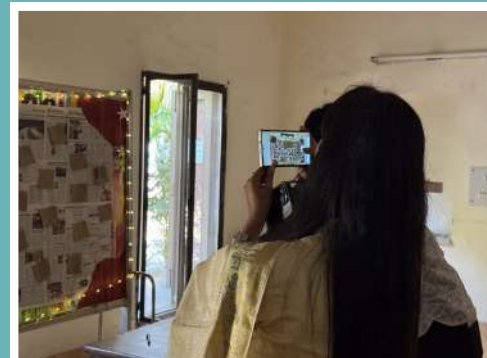
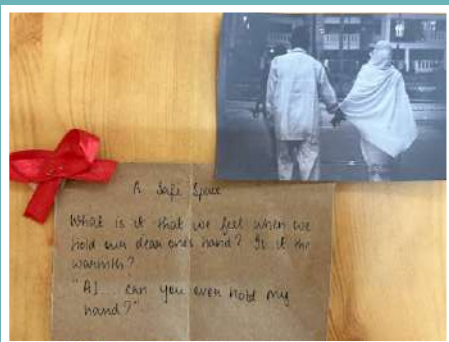
KEYNOTE SPEAKER SESSION

The department's Annual Academic Meet 'Zeitgeist' was held on 26th February under the theme "Harnessing AI as a Tool for Mental Well Being." The event featured a keynote address by Dr. Sameer Malhotra, a thought-provoking student-led panel discussion titled "Will AI Increase Equity in Mental Health?"





Exhibition



STUDENT-LED PANEL DISCUSSION ON AI AND EQUITY IN MENTAL HEALTH

A thought-provoking student-led panel discussion was convened on February 26th to explore the complex question: "Will AI Increase Equity in Mental Health?" The session was inaugurated by Logistics Head Anagha, who introduced the moderator and set the stage for a nuanced debate. The discussion was expertly moderated by Yashasvi Singla, a clinical psychiatrist and practitioner in Gurgaon and an alumna of Delhi University, who guided the conversation among panelists Satyapriya Narang, Rania, and Nimrat. This prompted further exploration of accessibility, with panelists highlighting that the equity debate is often a matter of economic divide, questioning what happens to those who cannot afford any form of care.



WORKSHOP ON SKILLS FOR ONLINE THERAPY

Department of Psychology organized a workshop on "Skills for Online Therapy" to equip students with the competencies required for teletherapy practice. The session was facilitated by guest speakers Dr. Suyash Shreyas and Dr. Aastha Bansal, with Dr. Shiksha Deepak serving as the moderator. The event witnessed active participation from students and faculty. The workshop commenced with a warm welcome by the student organizing team. The student anchors heads of the design and the photography teams introduced the theme of the workshop and invited Dr. Shiksha Deepak to the podium. Dr. Deepak, in her role as moderator, introduced the profile and expertise of the first speaker, Dr. Suyash Shreyas.



Dr. Suyash Shreyas' His talk covered the ABC model (Antecedent-Behavior Consequence) and the importance of availability, behavior, and competence in therapeutic settings. He also reflected on the role of social media in shaping modern mental health discourse. Dr. Aastha Bansal, a practitioner specializing in Trauma-Focused Therapy, continued the session. She shared that her own experience of undergoing therapy has informed her practice, offering her unique observations about the therapeutic process.

NEURAL KNOCKOUT QUIZ



Department of Psychology's Books, Documentaries, and Media team successfully hosted its inaugural quiz, "The Neural Knockout," blending psychology with artificial intelligence in a stimulating contest on the occasion of Zeitgeist, the annual psychology fest. The event commenced with a welcome from Surabhi Kashyap, with Dr. Pushpita Behera and Ms. Pamyaphy Ngashang serving as judges. Six teams participated, including two from Gargi College and Indraprastha College for Women. Following the rules, the competition unfolded across five rounds. Eva and Harnoor maintained a live scoreboard throughout. The opening MCQ round saw Sicologia and Standard Deviation score early points. A picture-based round and a timed crossword puzzle followed, where Team Goosebumps emerged as the highest scorer with 40 points. The "Mind in Motion" round, then tested the application of psychological and AI concepts to practical scenarios. The final round was a thrilling buzzer contest on Buzzin' live, moderated by Charu.



IMPACT OF DIGITAL MEDIA ON YOUNG MINDS



On February 26th, the Psychology department at Lady Shri Ram College for Women hosted "Impact of Digital Media on Young Minds" as part of Zeitgeist, the Psychology Department's annual fest. Moderator Dr. Sentisula Longchar introduced Dr. Amit Sen, a child and adolescent psychiatrist who has taught at Ashoka University, TISS, and DU, and worked with organizations in both India and the UK. Dr. Sen began by engaging students directly, asking them to reconsider what adolescence truly means. Presenting fMRI scans and brain studies of individuals aged five to twenty, he challenged conventional understanding—"the brain continues developing well into the early thirties", he explained, meaning adolescence extends far beyond eighteen. This carries significant implications for how we understand social skills, emotional regulation, and the choices young people make. The discussion then turned somber. Dr. Sen referenced the Ghaziabad tragedy and the recent case of three sisters, contextualizing these within India's youth mental health crisis. Suicide rates have climbed from twenty-four per day four years ago to over thirty today, with one young person aged fourteen to twenty dying every hour. These figures, he suggested, cannot be separated from digital media's influence.



ETHICS IN AI : CASE COMPETITION



The session brought together students, professionals, and faculty to engage in discussions surrounding the use of AI in expanding access to mental health care. The event was judged by Mr. T. Kannan, Department of Political Science at LSR and Ms. Vimanshi Solanki, Department of Psychology. Vibeli outlined the presentation guidelines, allowing six minutes per participant, including four minutes for presenting. The first presentation by Antara focused on designing an ethical AI system to expand access to mental health care. She highlighted the shortage of mental health professionals in India and the issue of client dropouts. Subsequent presentations introduced diverse models such as Logopsychology, which explored the illusion of therapeutic presence and the importance of boundaries, and “Saathi,” presented by Bhavya and Alia, which incorporated cognitive and behavioural principles while emphasising regional and cultural sensitivity. Another notable model, “Sukoon,” proposed a CBT-based AI system offering primary psychological support, emotional processing tools, and crisis escalation mechanisms, while maintaining strict ethical standards such as informed consent, data encryption, and non-diagnostic functioning. The final presentation highlighted the limitations of AI, reinforcing that AI cannot replace therapists.



VALDICTORY CEREMONY





Student Achievements.

Internships :

4th years :

1. **Sargam Mishra:**

- Selected for a Niti Aayog Internship

3rd years :

1. **Arpita Bairwa:**

- Interned at Udhmodya Foundation, University of Delhi, for 6 months (16th August to 15th February)
- Observership in the Department of Psychiatry (Clinical Mental Health Unit) at the Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences (IHBAS) for 1 month

2. **Bulbul Singh:**

- Research intern at AIIMS, New Delhi, for 3 months.

3. **Devanshi Mishra:**

- Delhi University Vice Chancellor Internship (Centre for Disabilities Studies): (November 2025-May 2026)

4. **Divya Masiwal:**

- HR Intern, Zigsaw (Startup India certified venture of GFL Recruitment, serving 2000+ clients)
- Intern, Adda247 (e-learning platform with over 40 million monthly users)

5. **Lavanaya Rawat:**

- Psychology Intern at Central Jail Tihar

6. Vanessa Mukoo :

- Summer Intern (Consulting) at Grant Thornton Bharat LLP for 2 months (16th June to 18th August 2025).

2nd years :

1. Madhurita Banerjee :

- Appointed as the Club Facilitator for Raganjali, the Music Club, during the Special Foundation Course (SFC) 2025 at the National Communications Academy-Finance (NCA-F). Conducted 14 sessions between 23rd September and 6th December, teaching the nuances of Hindustani Classical Music to Officer Trainees from various All India and Central Civil Services.

2. Sheen Madan:

- Marketing intern at Kama Ayurveda for 2 months.

Achievements :

4th years :

1. Sargam Mishra:

- Secured 99.11 percentile in CAT 2025 examination.

3rd years :

1. Bhavya Tripathi:

- All India inter- university '25, won bronze for DU
- Delhi state shooting championship- silver
- Asian shooting championship, Kazakhstan: mixed team silver and women's team gold
- National shooting championship- Delhi team silver(sr) Delhi team gold (Jr)
- Set a new record for Khelo India university games 120/125
- Represented India at the World Cup, Argentina
- Represented India at the World Cup, Peru
- Represented India at the Jr. World Cup, Germany
- Represented India at the Jr. World Cup, Delhi

1st years :

1. Manasvi Singh :

- Placed 1st position in Photography Competition organised by Hindu College (event name: National Science Day Photography Competition) organised by the department of chemistry (Tatva) held on the 28th of February 2026.

2. Ridhima Dugar :

- Published a book "Rhythm" which is listed on Amazon & won the 21st Century Emily Dickinson Award. It was awarded by Bookleaf Publishing in September 2025.

Paper Presentations :

3rd years :

1. Dhanee Bawa :

- Award for "Best Paper" at National Students' Seminar, Organised by IQAC, Kalindi College, DU on 1st April 2026. My paper was titled - Narratives of Aspiration and Resilience: Reframing Development and Social Mobility Through the Movie "12th Fail".

2nd years :

1. Ching Hauniang and Lamneikim :

- Received the second position award for the northeast cell paper presentation: Henosis (Gargi) on 'Matriarchal traditions and cultural resilience, exploring the role of women in shaping northeastern India's societal fabric'. Our paper is titled "Holding up the roof: matriarchy, identity and women's economic agency in the Khasi and Naga tribes". The competition took place on the 11th of October 2025.

Placements (Batch of 2025-26)



Aadisha Chandel
Associate at Nation with Namu



Apeksha Sahgal
Lead Marketing Analyst at Insaito



Bhumika Patidar
Specialist TPA- Gartner



Sargam Mishra
Superblue on-campus placement at Korn Ferry



Divya Masiwal
Analyst- Talent Acquisition at
People Labs



Gulpreet Kaur
Placed as Executive Assistant to CEO
at People Labs



Pakhi Priya
NTT Data - Executive Hiring Research
Assistant



Vanessa Mukoo
Placed as Analyst in the Consulting
Team at Korn Ferry

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Association In-Charge



Dr. Siksha Deepak &
Dr. Megha Dhillon

Department Teams (2025-26)



Media and Publicity Team



Books, Documentaries and
Media Team



Data Coordination and
Alumni Outreach Team



The Learning Curve
Editorial Assistants



Logistics and Hospitality Team



Design and Decor Team



Research Circle





Press and Photography Team

Department Union (2025-26)



(L-R): Disha Prajapati [General Secreretary], Kritika Manatwal [President], Rhea Sethi [Treasurer]



OUR CONTRIBUTORS

TEAM HEADS

Charvi Gupta, 3rd year

Meera Nair, 3rd year

Navya Yadav, 2nd year

VOLUNTEERS

Ananya Pratap

Rakshita Sharma

Kashvi Wadhwa

Sara Sharma

Kunja Puri

Shalini

Lavanya Rawat

Shatabdi Gogoi

Manasvi Singh

Suhanshi Goyal

Neivitou Liegise

NOTABLE CONTRIBUTIONS

Cover Page Illustrator

Kanishka Maurya, Psychology department (1st year)

Media Recommendations

Books, Documentaries and Media Team

Proofreading

Eva Singh, Aastha Kapoor, Snigdha Senapati, Surabhi Kashyap



Department of Psychology
Lady Shri Ram College for Women
University of Delhi