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OBJECTIFIED: Forced marriages and Bitter reality of violence against women in India

Anurag Wallace

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OBJECTIFIED

Anurag Wallace

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Abstract

Domestic violence against women is an ongoing problem in India. With cases rising ever higher, the time has come to talk openly about the uncomfortable truths behind arranged marriages, which foster injustice and often lead to violence against women. The wedding dress is a symbol of purity in traditional Indian weddings, but in the case of marriages that turn abusive, it can become a symbol of oppression and patriarchy. During the research phase of this investigation, women once stuck in abusive marriages—treated as objects—talked about the objects that made them feel trapped and explained how these everyday objects became silent witnesses to violence. These symbolic objects are embroidered into the very fabric of a hand-stitched wedding dress and exhibited in public, to start a conversation, raise awareness and support women—to serve as a call for societal change.

Introduction

India is a country where people worship many female goddesses. The goddess "Durga" is the symbol of strength, the goddess "Laxmi" is the goddess of wealth¹, and the goddess "Parvati" is the symbol of motherhood and justice². The idols of these and many other goddesses are celebrated and even placed in prayer rooms in most Hindu houses. However, for a culture that literally worships women, existence for mortal females is often much more perilous. India has a significant issue of domestic violence as evidenced in many news outlets, reports, and studies. The circle of events leading to the place where women are assaulted and tortured often starts with weddings.



Figure: 1

Arranged marriages are far from rare in India, where the bride's parents decide whom their daughter is going to marry. This situation leads to a place where women are often vulnerable and are afraid of the unknown. Imagine a situation where a girl is forced into marrying a man she knows nothing about. She was asked to marry this guy by her parents on account of his family's position in society. She later finds out that the guy is abusive and then she is stuck in a relationship she cannot get out of. This is indeed a brutal reality for many women in India.

The issue has been around us like an invisible plague that affects people directly or indirectly. If a woman is abused or raped, the family and friends become indirect victims of the trauma too. This also affects her contribution to society, her workplace, and her productivity at home and work³. Apart from the decline and damage to her mental and physical health, many women often suffer from not being accepted as a part of society if they leave their partners because of rape or abuse.



Figure: 2

Design is one of the factors in addressing these societal issues and how people react to a situation. Artifacts are often used to make a statement or to build a direct or indirect relation to a certain time, place, and scenario. Arguably, design is about solving problems, but it has the power to instigate a conversation about the underlying issues in society. "Artivism is a term that explores artistic expression as a powerful response to large-scale violations of human rights"⁴. Design can be used to address social and political issues, by manifesting in various ways, such as artifacts, decorations, and graphics. In this project, I address the issue of domestic violence by looking into the symbolic values of the traditional Hindu wedding outfit, and how in cases of forced marriages the narrative can change to depict the hidden truths of the issue.

As someone who identifies as a male, I understand my privilege and my position in society. I am doing this project to be an advocate for those who cannot come up and talk about these issues openly because their voices are mostly silenced. My project opposes the social stigma behind intimate partner violence by encouraging a conversation on how, in many cases, wedding rituals stow away the bitter realities of violence against women. I feel the façade created for weddings, the hidden realities of what is behind the bridal veil, and the significance of consent are points that need to be re-examined in the name of equality.

Literature Review

What is Domestic violence?

Domestic violence is often used as a synonym for intimate partner violence, which is committed by one of the people in an intimate relationship against the other person and can take place in either heterosexual or same-sex relationships or between former spouses or partners. Different articles, studies, thesis, etc., speak about Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) along similar lines. The issue has always been a part of society and is very much an ongoing and prevailing issue. It is an epidemic, with many cases going unreported, and has a ripple effect on people related to the victims personally and at times even professionally. "Most people adhere to the misconception that sexual assault is about sex. It is not about sex. The word 'sexual' in sexual assault only describes the type of assault."⁵ The psychology of the crime and how it is about "power and control" and is meant to degrade the person physically, emotionally, economically, and sexually. There are many angles from which to look at the crime which leads to an in-depth explanation of it. It is a crime that is by law a punishable offense, yet it is the most underreported crime.

Figure: 3



Impacts of Domestic Violence

Depending on the situation, the intensity, and how the victim's economic, social, and geographic conditions are, the impacts of sexual assaults and distress vary from case to case. It affects the overall health (physical and mental) of an individual. Women often suffer grave physical injuries which can lead to death in some cases, and in other cases, there is the mental health that is completely compromised leading to depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and substance abuse. In many cases, there are adverse coping mechanisms that are reasonably well understood by researchers and health professionals who deal with victims and are sometimes noticed by other family members and close friends. These can include changes in hairstyles, use of drugs or alcohol, overeating or not eating at all. These are only a few that can be seen, but many others like nightmares, having regular showers or baths, etc., are harder to observe in individuals. Depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are common, and victims may never fully recover.⁶

Economic effects of Domestic Violence

Taking a broader view of the issue and how it affects not just the individual but also a substantial proportion of the community and society, a report was written by "The World Bank" says "In some countries, violence against women is estimated to cost countries up to 3.7% of their GDP – more than double what most governments spend on education."⁷ The idea that an assault on individual results in expense to the authorities, typically taken from taxpayers, illustrates how it is a sequence that has direct and indirect effects on everyone. These costs are a part of the annual financial reports in each countries budgets and expenses which indicates the money that is spent on trials, prosecution, etc.



Figure: 4

The issue in Plain sight

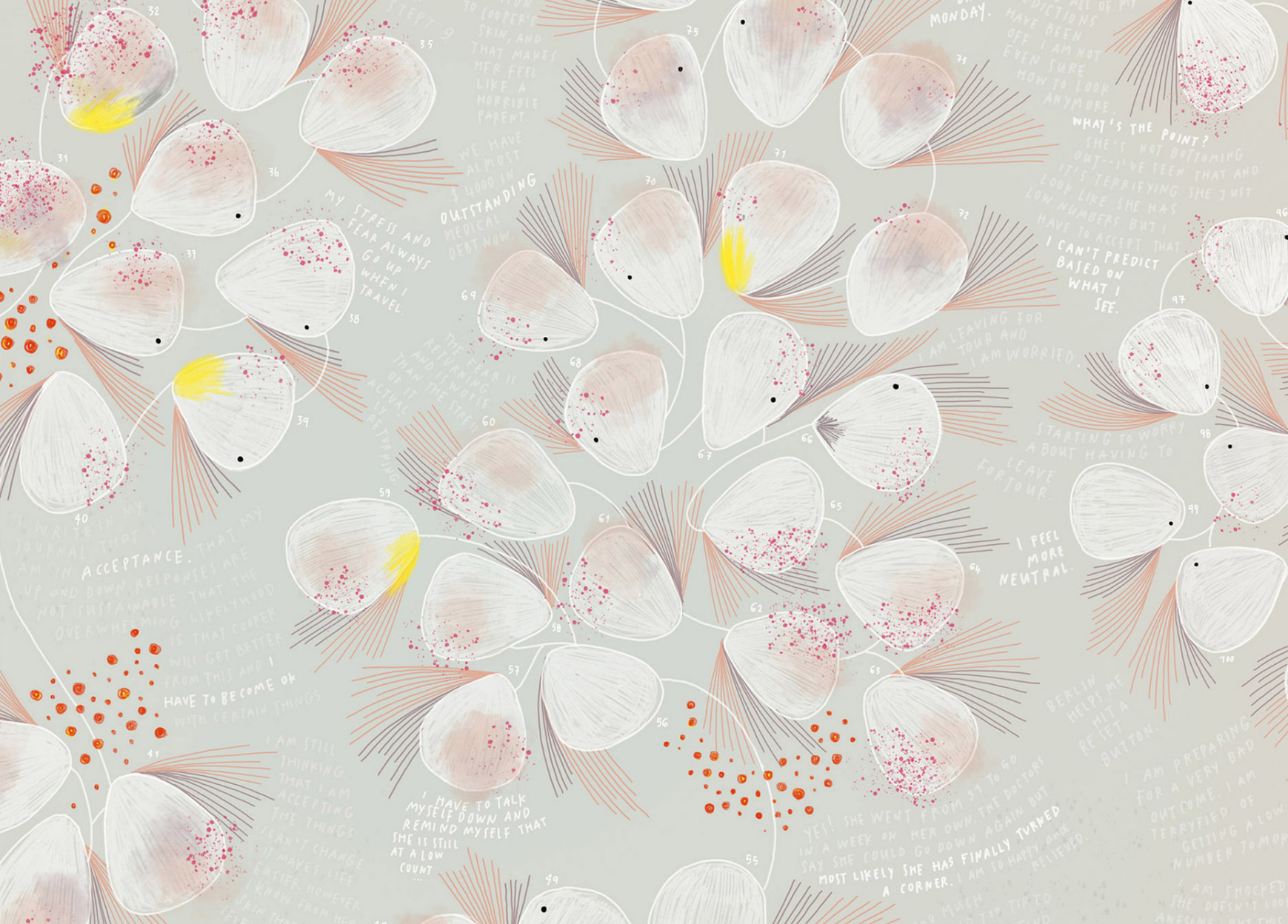
Visual communication is “the use of visual elements to convey ideas and information which include but are not limited to, signs, typography, drawing, graphic design, illustration, industrial design, advertising, animation, and electronic resources.”⁸ As the saying goes, “a picture is worth a thousand words”; this is true when a story is told graphically, with a strong design, instead of verbally.⁹ Words and numbers provide one with an opportunity to register the information precisely, but at the same time data that are in large numbers, recurring number patterns, and at times social issues spoken in numerical terms are easy to be missed or unacknowledged by the human brains.

Domestic violence is an issue that has been existing in society. The reason that it goes unnoticed is that traditionally, the data is presented in numerical form, while can easily go unacknowledged in the way it should. For example, it is known from various sources and studies conducted by the UN and UNHCR that one in three women face sexual assault once in their lifetime,¹⁰ a piece of information that is easy to register but also easy to ignore the larger impact. But in a room full of women if one in three were wearing the same bright yellow dress, it would be easy to register how many in a crowd of 100 women is 1 in 3.

Designers and artists might have multiple, contrasting ideas about what visual communication is. Visual communication is a tool to inform but also, to provoke, evoke, instigate, and trigger. The idea has been practiced since the Stone Age when one would see cave paintings as a form of visual communication.

“We need data visualization because a visual summary of information makes it easier to identify patterns and trends than looking through thousands of rows on a spreadsheet.”¹¹ The human brain works by picking up on visual cues, finding them more engaging than numbers and figures. It evokes feelings, triggers thoughts and ideas, and helps a person to read, understand, analyze, and register the information in a non-traditional, yet creative manner. While working with topics of certain significance, the use of visual representation helps audiences nurture an interest in the topic, while also being attracted to the representation of data.

Precedents



TO SHOW
COOPER'S
SKIN, AND
THAT MAKES
HER FEEL
LIKE A
HORRIBLE
PARENT.

MONDAY.
I DON'T
HAVE BEEN
OFF I AM NOT
EVEN SURE
HOW TO LOOK
ANYMORE.

WE HAVE
ALMOST
3,400 IN
OUTSTANDING
MEDICAL
DEBT NOW.

MY STRESS AND
FEAR ALWAYS
GO UP
WHEN I
TRAVEL.

WHAT'S THE POINT?
THEY'RE NOT BUTTING
OUT--I'VE SEEN THAT AND
IT'S TERRIFYING SHE JUST
LOOKS LIKE SHE HAS
LOW NUMBERS BUT I
HAVE TO ACCEPT THAT
I CAN'T PREDICT
BASED ON
WHAT I
SEE.

I AM LEAVING FOR
TOUR AND
I AM WORRIED.

STARTING TO WORRY
ABOUT HAVING TO
LEAVE
FOR TOUR.

I FEEL
MORE
NEUTRAL.

BERLIN
HELPS ME
RE-FIND
A
BUTTON.

I AM PREPARING
FOR A VERY BAD
OUTCOME. I AM
TERRIFIED OF
GETTING A LOW
NUMBER TOMORROW.

YES! SHE WENT FROM 37 TO 50
IN A WEEK ON HER OWN. THE DOCTORS
SAY SHE COULD GO DOWN AGAIN BUT
MOST LIKELY SHE HAS FINALLY TURNED
A CORNER. I AM TO HAPPY AND
RELIEVED.

I AM SHOCKED
SHE PRESENTS
AWESOME BUT I

WRITE IN MY
JOURNAL THAT I
AM IN
ACCEPTANCE. THAT MY
UP AND DOWN RESPONSES ARE
NOT SUSTAINABLE THAT THE
OVERWHELMING LIFESTYLE
IS THAT COOPER
WILL GET BETTER
FROM THIS AND I
HAVE TO BECOME OK
WITH CERTAIN THINGS.

I AM STILL
THINKING
THAT I AM
ACCEPTING
THE THINGS
I CAN'T CHANGE
IT MOVES FASTER, HOWEVER
I KNOW FROM MY
SKIN THAT

I HAVE TO TALK
MYSELF DOWN AND
RE-MIND MYSELF THAT
SHE IS STILL
AT A LOW
COUNT

TOUCH
I'M TIRED

Bruises - The Data We Don't See by Giorgia Lupi and Kaki King

Information designer Giorgia Lupi and her friend Kaki King worked on a project together called "Bruises." The project is a data visualization of Kaki's 3-year-old daughter Cooper who was diagnosed with Idiopathic Thrombocytopenic Purpura, or ITP, an auto-immune disease where her body attacks her platelets, a crucial part of blood clotting. She was getting spontaneous bruises and burst blood vessels called petechiae all over her body.¹²

Giorgia used visual tools to understand human nature and document different types of processes. Unlike numbers, bar graphs, and pie charts, Giorgia used visuals like a petal to represent Cooper's skin, big and small red dots that visually narrate the bruises Cooper got on the various dates and the intensity of those bruises. Many other visual elements were used in a very sensible manner to describe the 120 days of Cooper's journey from the day she was diagnosed till her recovery. In a Ted talk she gave, she asks a question "Can a data visualization evoke empathy and activate us at an emotional level, and not only at a cognitive one? Can looking at a data visualization make you feel part of a story of someone's life?"¹³ The project is a beautiful documentation of Cooper's journey while she fought and recovered ITP. Kaki produced the music and played it while the data was being presented at various events.

Figure: 5



Peju Alatise - 'Wrapture.. a story of cloth'

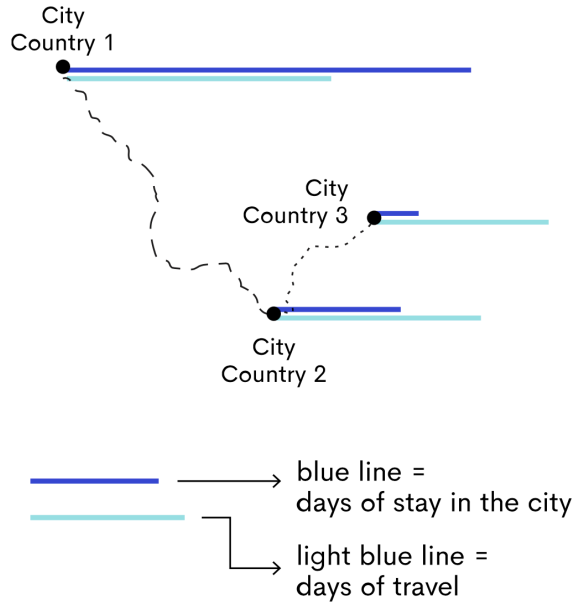
"Wrapture... A story of cloth" is created using fabrics, ceramics, and metal. The 3-dimensional pieces have an underlying theme, highlighting the absence of women - a theme that specifically resonates across Nigerian society after the disappearance of hundreds of girls at the hand of Boko Haram since 2014.¹⁴ For this installation she collected a variety of local fabrics (mostly called Ankara which were designed between the year 1970 to date), used and new, and then curated them by cutting and reattaching them in a way that creates a new visual language.¹⁵ The new composition shows details of each piece of fabric and its own symbolic relevance.

The narrative is much more than the mere material, it goes deeper in sense of what it represents to the community. These prints are from the Nigerian community which was a common language of fashion, statement, and a part of women's everyday clothing. Each print is unique because it symbolizes a group within the community itself which further leads to being directly associated with the women who went missing in each of these sub-groups.

Figure: 6

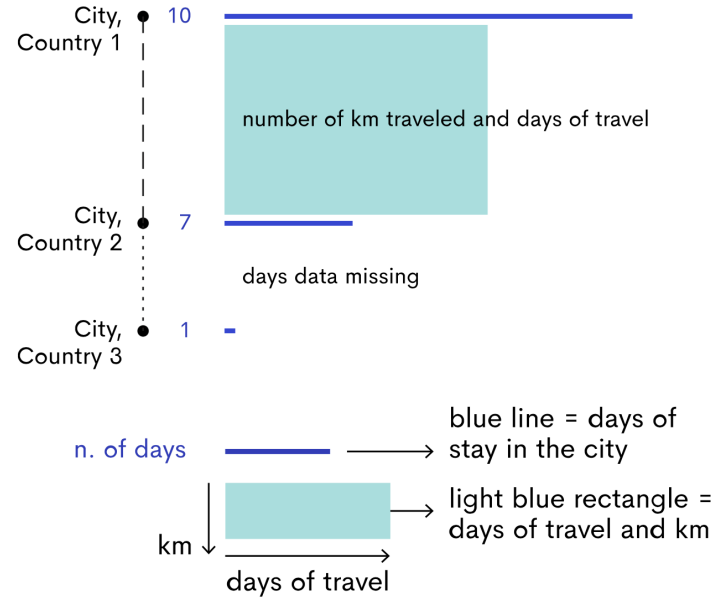
Paths

The line shows the route taken to arrive in Italy and the intermediate stages



Distances

The graph shows the days and the kilometers



Transportation

- on foot
- mostly on foot, some parts by car
- by car/bus/truck
- by train
- by boat
- no transportation data

“The Stories Behind a Line” A project by Federica Fragapane with Alex Piacentini

“The Stories Behind a Line” is a visual narration of six asylum seekers’ routes.¹⁶ Federica Fragapane started working on this project with its genesis in Italy. The project is a visual documentation of various aspects of their journey like the route they took, the number of days they stayed in a place or a country, the number of days of the travel, total kilometers traveled, and more such details relating to the journey and how they arrived in Italy. Federica is renowned for her ability to transform tables and numbers into an opportunity to tell a captivating story.

The project has collected data such as the start and the end date of the travel of the person, details as to where they made stops, for how many days, and some specific memories they have associated with that place during the journey. While managing to capture the attention of the audience, the project used simple elements of design (lines, dots, colors) to create a strong and impactful visual language for someone to understand the journey easily. It also has a deeper level of humanism when the highlighted dots are personal ledgers and stories that these travelers chose to share with Federica. The project is a classic example of intuitive design, where easy and simple elements help a person to understand quantitative data, often overwhelming for the reader, into an informative experience as it is intended.

Figure: 7



Figure: 8

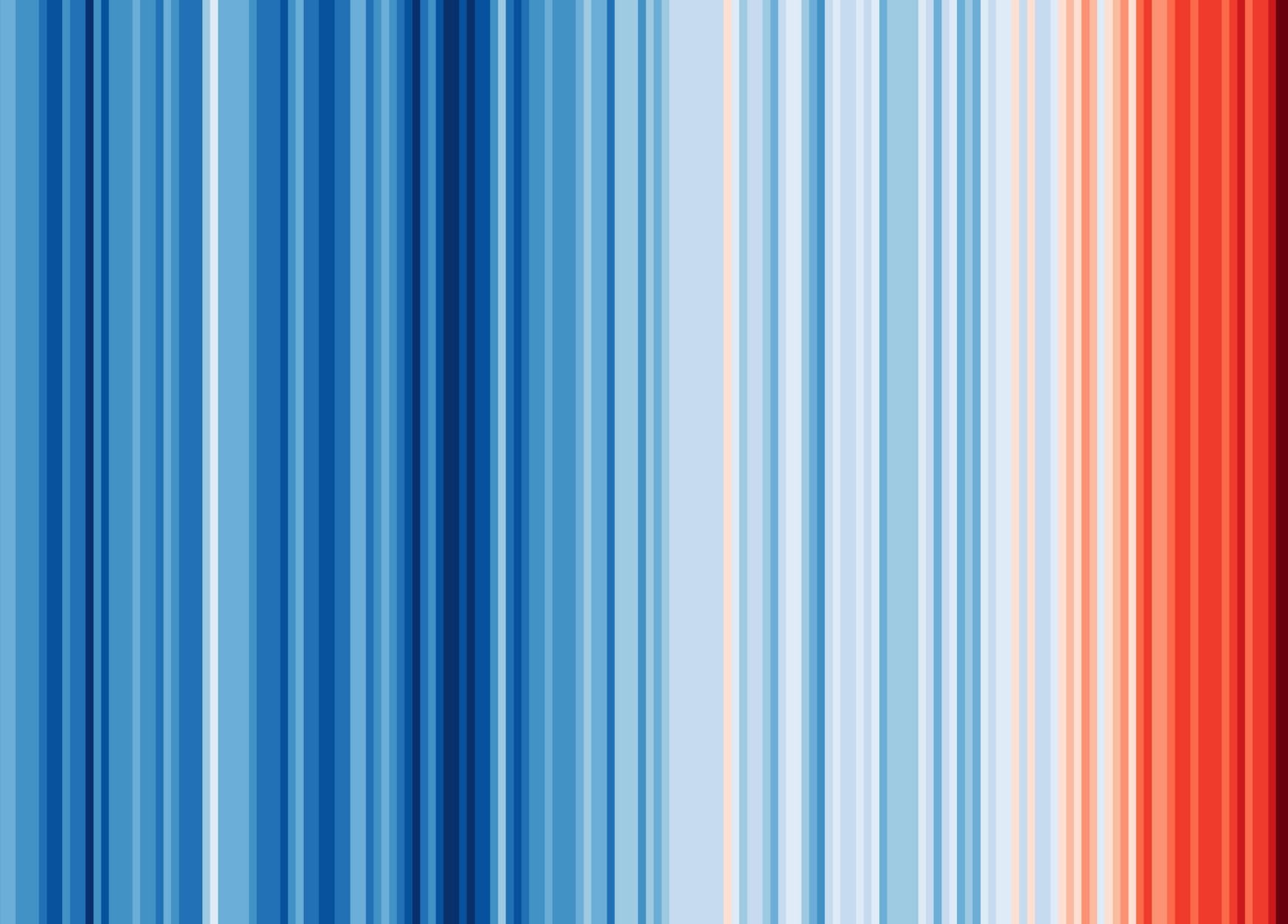


Figure: 9

Mere Objects: An Interactive Art Project for Survivors of Sexual Assault by Sarah Jane

Sarah Jane, who is a survivor herself, in her initial work, only focused on truth, goodness, and beauty. Her current artist statement talks of celebration and uniting people across cultural divides. She describes the beginning of the journey as "The call" where she describes hearing a voice saying, "It's time to make something for the survivors".¹⁷ The project is a stunning installation where a group of 20 women survivors, were asked to share one or more tiny objects that represent themselves. The object is then placed in a small bottle – a portrait of a survivor – and added to the ever-growing collection. The idea was to create a great, glittering mass of bottles: a "cloud of witnesses" testifying that survivors are not alone, that violation does not define these women, and that hope, and healing are possible, through a stunning installation of these droplets.

The project sends a strong message in a very tangible, visual way also respecting the individuals. Sexual assault is a topic that requires attention to detail and empathy, and the artist justifies it in her art with grace and simplicity by connecting her audience to relate to these everyday objects that are very much a part of everyone's life how it is also a representation of these women themselves.



Warming Stripes for GLOBE from 1850-2019 by Ed Hawkins, Climate scientist, University of Reading

Ed Hawkins is a climate scientist and professor at the University of Reading, who works to improve regional climate projections and quantify uncertainty in climate predictions and impacts. The warming stripes were first published on his blog in 2018, but they really rose in international popularity over the summer of 2019.¹⁸ The image was shown on the backdrop of BBC News while the reporters talked about the effects of climate change and how society needed a shift in how they contribute to less carbon emission.

In the visual, each stripe is a year from 1850-2019, where the darkest shade of blue represents how cold the year was and the deep red is an indication of a warm year. The shades in between represent how hot or cold the year was.

While global warming is a hot topic around the globe, people often miss out on the data due to the way it is spoken about, in numerical forms, complicated bar graphs, pie charts, and so on. Global warming is a prevalent issue that needs the attention and understanding of billions of people. Most people don't connect instantly to big numbers and complicated sketches.

The approach Ed Hawkins took to talk about the issue was with a very simple element and that is color.

Figure: 10

Investigation

Even though the issue is global and has a huge impact on the overall health (mental and physical) of the victim, everyone has a personal understanding of how they see the problem. In many parts of India, having the husband as the dominating partner in the relationship is acceptable within the family and at times even in society. This often leads to justification for abuses (verbal or physical). Although there aren't many published studies or papers focusing on this, my personal experience of witnessing many such cases of abuse from dominant males has contributed to building my opinion, leading to forming my own conclusions and interpretations of the issue.

- Methodology

At the initial stage of my research, I looked at researching gender-based violence which is equally an important issue to be addressed. I collected data and decoded that into an abstract mirror that can be seen in Figure: 11. The various signs and symbols talked about the physical and psychological effects of violence on a woman.

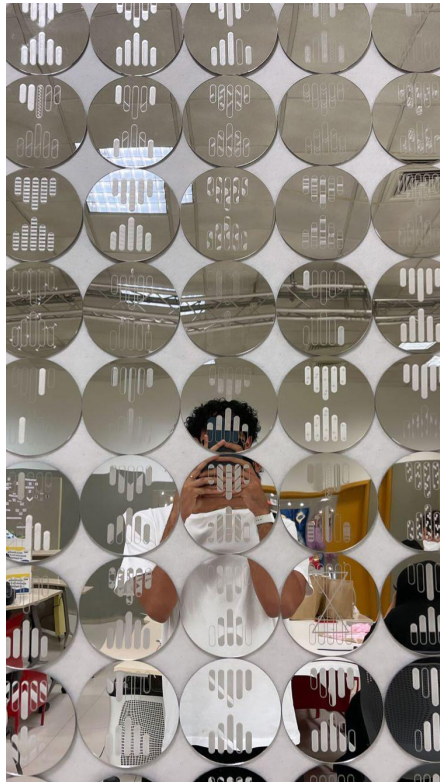


Figure: 11

The creation led to the realization of two very important aspects of my research and the direction that I needed to head towards. Firstly, the outcome needed to be clear and relatable to the audience. In the mirror, the symbols are only an abstraction of the data, and the figures were “my personal interpretation” of how I would visually create a language. But that hindered the actual aim of the project, which was to address the issue while spreading awareness. The second lesson learned from this project was that I needed to narrow down my research, and for it to be more personal and yet relatable to the viewers and the readers. Hence, I decided to focus on the issue of Domestic violence.

- Data collection

Moving further with my investigation, I conducted interviews with victims and survivors of domestic violence. At the beginning of my investigation, I reached out to an NGO called “Sneha”, which connected me with women who were victims of domestic violence. The women I spoke to, stressed the fact of how they felt like an “object” during their experience, which led me to a common theme. I then asked these women to identify an object that reminded them of loss of control and being trapped in the situation they were in.

The interviews I conducted provided me with quotes from the women explaining “what was the experience like” which gave me the qualitative data. The research and readings helped me with the figures in India between the year 2000 to 2020 for reported cases of domestic violence, which helped as the quantitative data. Together, the quantitative and the qualitative data helped me create a framework for my outcome.

- Motivation for the Outcome

Weddings in India are more often an event to be remembered by the family, relatives, and society. The starting point of this journey toward an unknown future starts on the wedding day. Indian weddings are grand and so is the wedding outfit. Traditionally the wedding outfit is red and gold symbolizing purity and the beginning of a new life for the bride. This further led me to the decision of highlighting this very outfit but portraying it as a symbol of oppression. The idea is that we as a society, are trying to hide the underlying issue with the exaggeration of the dress, the ornamentation on it, and the rituals around the wedding.

Outcome

Growing up I witnessed domestic violence. Quite early on in my life, the experience became my lived reality. When I was young, I could not intervene, immobile, helpless, I felt like an object. During my investigation, when women came up with the same theme which was "I felt like I was an object", gave me the direction I needed to take towards my outcome.

Every woman I spoke to, talked about one object that made them feel helpless and trapped in the situation they were in - each object with a story of its own. An everyday object that one would not give a second thought to if seen in their surroundings became a "silent witness of violence".

- **Objects and the story**

Showerhead: I felt dirty... I could take endless showers, and still feel dirty... all I would stare at was the showerhead...

Pregnancy test: I was scared to bring a child into this world... And taking the pregnancy test was the most harrowing part of my experience...

Pills: The pain, both physical and mental was never-ending... I used to ask myself, "Is this what my life will be? Sealed like a bottle of pills I always reach out to" ...

Knife: He often blackmailed me with it... he used to say "I can do anything I want, so don't try to think you will leave" ...

Perfume bottle: The smell of his perfume when he would leave home for work, remained in the house... It reminded me of him... like he is around... as if he is looking at me...

Shoes: Used to tie my hands with his shoelaces and hit me with his shoes...

Lock: He would lock me in the room for hours before he would let me out... whenever he was away, I always wanted to throw that lock away... but the fear was far too deeper than the pain I had...

House Keys: We bought that house together... Looking at the keys hanging on the key rack, I never imagined the house which was going to be my safe space with a partner I should have felt safe with... will become something out of a horror movie. I was terrified to step inside the house, to use those keys to enter the hell...

- **Objects and the story**

Calendar: The days would just not end... I would count each day since he first hit me, which was the wedding night... I wanted my life to end, and I would look at the numbers on the calendar...

Flowers: I remember looking at the flower arrangement he always insisted on having in his study...

Pillow: I used to cry myself to sleep... and try to cover up my screams on that pillow...

Lipstick: Even as he tortured me, he made me cover my bruises and scars with make-up... wouldn't let me stay even in the house without lipstick...

Wine bottle: He would drink and then hit me... I would see a new bottle in the house, and it would send chills down my spine...

Wedding ring: The only thing I looked it over n over again, asking myself why did I let myself into this situation... "will I ever have the courage to remove it"?

Band-Aid: To hide the cuts, the scratches... And yes... I never had a day when I didn't need one...

Alarm clock: I would wait for it to go off in the morning, so I can run out of the bed and the room... and then look at it through the nights when he would abuse me...

Weights: He was very strong... stronger than most men... he used to train at home...

Comb: I used to love combing my hair... he would pull them so often that I ended up chopping them off...

- **Data and statistics**

2000	82	2011	1479
2001	168	2012	1867
2002	220	2013	1574
2003	29	2014	2183
2004	35	2015	1527
2005	77	2016	2043
2006	207	2017	1046
2007	17	2018	832
2008	465	2019	921
2009	579	2020	1579
2010	1159	2021	2383

Figure: 12 Domestic violence complaints received per one million women between 2000-2021.(all figures in %), India. Statistics by "The Hindu" newspaper.

State	Never sought help and never told anyone	Never sought help but told someone	Sought help
Andhra Pradesh	82.8	9.6	7.7
Bihar	84.3	6.8	8.9
Gujarat	74.7	9.9	15.4
Karnataka	70.8	12.6	16.6
Maharashtra	78.8	7.8	13.4
Telangana	73	8.2	18.8
West Bengal	79.7	8.5	11.9

Figure: 13 Women who experienced domestic violence, All figures in %. Statistics by "The Hindu" newspaper

State	Doctor/medical personnel	Police	Lawyer	Social service organisations
Andhra Pradesh	0	10.4	0	2.1
Bihar	4.8	0	0	1.5
Gujarat	0	0	0	0
Karnataka	14.3	14.3	14.3	14.1
Maharashtra	0	1.9	0	0
Telangana	0	6.1	0.5	0.6
West Bengal	0.9	3.6	0	7.4

Figure: 14 Women who approached relevant authority, all figures in %. Statistics by "The Hindu" newspaper



The Wedding Outfit

In many parts of the world, the wedding outfit is a symbol of new life. In India, it is an embodiment of purity, wealth, and the beginning of a new journey. The grand nature of the wedding and the ornamentation on the wedding outfit is a direct representation of Indian culture and rituals. The colors red and gold are traditionally what one can see on a wedding dress where red is the color of matrimony and gold for wealth and fortune she would endure in her new life. Consisting of 3 pieces the outfit has a skirt (lehenga), a blouse (choli), and a veil(dupatta).

The motifs that are seen as a part of the ornamentation draw their inspiration from the intricacy of the architecture, the henna, the flora, and the fauna in India.

In contrast to the symbolism of the wedding outfit, I created an intricate, hand-embroidered, and hand-tailored ensemble, with details of the qualitative data collected from the women I spoke with and the quantitative data that I gathered during my investigation.

The skirt consists of 18 panels that are joined together to form a full circle, where each panel has an object embroidered within the design (ornamentation). These objects are the ones chosen from the 25 women I spoke with and narrowed down to 18 based on the relevance of some of those quite close to each other. I decided to have a block and stark embroidery technique for it to stand out, while keeping the colors traditional, abstracting the fact that how the issue is woven within the fabric of our society, and how it stands out and blends at the same time.

Traditionally, the veil is to keep the modesty of the woman who is about to be married. In different parts of the country, depending on the geographical location, women are expected to keep the veil at a certain level to hide their faces. In some places it's translucent and in some, it is a fabric from which the face cannot be seen at all. The way I wanted to create the embroidery on the veil is by adding text of the data collected on the border of the veil. From the conversations with the survivors, I learned that most of them were aware of the concept of domestic violence and how they were either pushed into marrying the person or once married couldn't get out of it. I took the veil as the conscience of the woman where she is aware of these facts and still has to go ahead with it while hiding it from the world as she hides her face.

Figure: 15

Anurag Wallace

Objectified

Domestic violence against women is an ongoing problem in India. With cases rising over time, the state has come to talk openly about the socio-economic roots behind arranged marriages, which foster ignorance and often lead to violence against women. The wedding dress is a symbol of purity in traditional Indian weddings, but in the case of marriages that turn abusive, it can become a symbol of oppression and patriarchal abuse. In case-by-case research of this investigation, women once the objects that made them feel trapped, and explained how these everyday objects became silent witnesses to violence. These women's objects are transformed into the very fabric of a hand-stitched wedding dress and exhibited in public, to start a conversation, raise awareness and support women—to serve as a call for societal change.

May 2017

RAIN ADVISOR
Government Institute

ASSOCIATE ADVISOR
Fashion Week

READER
New York



Figure: 16



Figure. 17



Figure: 18



Figure: 19



Figure: 20



Figure: 21

Conclusion

Domestic violence is an issue that affects women physically and psychologically. It also strikes people who are connected to the victim both directly and indirectly. This project and the research I have conducted to support it were to address the issue and raise awareness. The quantitative and qualitative data acquired provide a reflection on the reality that this is an issue that cannot be solved overnight. Nevertheless, the research serves as a curtail starting point for discussion that can lead to positive change. This urgent topic cries out for attention and the approach I took to do so was to challenge the oppressive and patriarchal system that's still practiced in many parts of India.

The interviews conducted with victims and survivors of domestic violence helped me to identify and narrow down the objects that for them were witnesses of violence. These objects were embroidered into the wedding outfit, which is typically considered a symbol of new life and celebration in India. But in cases of domestic abuse, the same outfit quickly becomes a symbol of a new bride's oppression within the marriage. The precedents suggested ways of creating an outcome in a graphic format, addressing the issue of domestic through visual communication.

An Indian wedding outfit traditionally has three elements: a skirt, a blouse, and a veil. For this project, I created a skirt that has the traditional ornamentation hand-embroidered on it along with the graphical representation of icons of the objects, which were taken from the investigations, incorporated within the design. The objects are highlighted by an ancient technique that has been a part of the culture for centuries. The veil has a bold border with the statistical data embroidered on it which informs displays the numbers and figures for domestic violence over the span of 21 years in India. The embroidery, the color, and the design are archetypes of the wedding outfit, but the symbolic value is a contrast to the traditional meaning of it.

This project is created to strengthen and support women, men, and children, empowering them to speak up and start having these conversations more openly so that when a victim wishes to reach out, they can do so without any shame.

Future directions

Through the medium of this project, I aim to develop more projects that are addressing social issues, lead positive change and spread awareness. In the past, I worked on a project where I addressed the issue of men taking pictures of women without their consent, by creating a print with multiple QR codes on a gown. When trying to take a picture of a woman who is wearing this dress or a gown, one would face the challenge of multiple links popping up on the phone screen which would then lead them to the links of women's rights activists, women helpline numbers and achievements that great women in the past have made. These QR-triggered pop-ups served as a means of challenging the conscience of someone who was trying to objectify and capture a woman's image without her consent. The thesis has led to a realization that many such issues need to be addressed and hence has opened doors for future development in similar ways. While I address issues that affect us all globally, I plan to explore relatable and understandable ways to spark important conversations. One such method might be the wedding gown as a part of a performance art event or theatrical plays films to further deepen and expand the conversation on the topic of domestic abuse against women.

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