



UNDERGRADUATE
**RESEARCH
CONFERENCE
2025**

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH CONFERENCE 2025

12 April 2025 | 9am - 4:45pm
at Indus Valley School of Art & Architecture

PROGRAM

8:30 am Registration of Participants

9:00 am Welcome by Muqees Khan, Member of
Organizing Committee

9:15-10:45 am

Panel 1: Making Sense of Place and Space

Discussant: Ghania Shams Khan, Assistant Professor, Department of
Architecture, IVS, Karachi

Panelists:

Atiab Fatima Rehman, NCA, Class of 2024. *Bibi Pak Daman: A Case Study of
Women's Religious and Spiritual Agency in Shrines*

Syed Ahsen Raza, IVS, Class of 2024. *The Hyperpolis: A Case for the Synthetic,
Fantastic and Irrational*

Gulzain, Beaconhouse National University, Class of 2024. *Naani Pind di Vaar:
Shrines and Religious Practice in Chhajjoke*

Hajra Qaiser and **Wania Masood**, NUST, Class of 2024. *Female Autonomy in
the Private Sphere*

TEA

11:00-12:30 pm

Panel 2: Self and Nation

Discussant: Dr. Ali Gibran Siddiqui, Assistant Professor, Department of Social
Sciences and Liberal Arts, Institute of Business Administration, Karachi

Panelists:

Aman Qazi, LUMS, Class of 2024. *Psychoanalysis in Colonial India:
Psychological and Nationalist Articulations of Indian Subjecthood*

Musfira Khurshid, LUMS, Class of 2024. *Invoking God: Microhistories of Sedition
during the Rowlatt Act Resistance in Colonial Lahore 1919*

Iman Ashraf, Habib University, Class of 2025. *From Diversity to Conformity:
An Ontological Exploration of Language Politics and Identity Formation in
British India*

Rameen Salman, IBA, Class of 2024. *Framing the Boundary: An Understanding
of the Nation in the Bollywood Cricket Film*

LUNCH**1:30–3:00 pm****Panel 3: Partitions and their Fragments**

Discussant: Palvashay Sethi, Lecturer, Department of Social Sciences and Liberal Arts, Institute of Business Administration, Karachi

Panelists:

Ashmal Ameen Essa, IBA, Class of 2025. *Post-Partition State-Periphery Relationships: Comparing Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan, and Jammu & Kashmir and India*

Zehra Shabbir Khan, IVS, Class of 2024. *Material Migrants: Archiving the Pakistan-Bangladesh Partition of 1971 through its Material Remnants*

Zoha Binte Ashfaq, IVS, Class of 2024. *The Impact of Ethnic Tensions in Karachi during the 1980s and 1990s on the Lived Experiences of the Muhajir Community*

TEA**3:30–4:45 pm****Panel 4: Embodiment and Informality in Creative Subcultures**

Discussant: Syed Ali Mehdi Zaidi, PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, Stanford University, USA

Panelists:

Omais Danish Rafiq, IBA, Class of 2024. *'Jailbreakers, Jugaarus, and Jigars': Video Game Piracy and the Gaming Community in Karachi*

Eman Farhan, IVS, Class of 2024. *The Moving Bride: A Feminist Analysis of Decorated Buses in Shireen Jinnah Colony, Karachi*

Sofia Sarfraz and **Eman Khalid**, LUMS, Class of 2025. *Raags to Riches: The Economic Tale of Classical Musicians in Pakistan*

Muhammad Abrar, NCA, Class of 2024. *The Construction and Performance of Masculinity in Sindhi Malh: A Cultural Analysis*

4:45 pm

Concluding Remarks by Dr. Faiza Mushtaq, Dean and Executive Director, IVS

2025 Conference Committees



Faculty Organizers

Syed Haider Abbas Naqvi, Lecturer, Liberal Arts

Sumbul Khan, Assistant Professor, Liberal Arts

Faculty Selection Committee

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Ume Laila Hasan, Assistant Professor, Communication Design

Usman Ansari, Mohammad Usman Ansari, Assistant Professor, Interior Design

Sumbul Khan, Assistant Professor, Liberal Arts

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Syed Faaz Ali Chishti, Architecture

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Rumeesa Altaf, Fine Art

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Huda Nadeem, Communication Design

Yumna Zia, Communication Design

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Rabab Hasnain, Interior Design

Student Designer

Sana Ali

Panel 1: Making Sense of Place and Space



Discussant:

Ghania Shams Khan,
Assistant Professor,
Department of
Architecture, Indus
Valley School of Art
and Architecture,
Karachi.

Ghania Shams Khan is an architect and an educator based in Karachi, Pakistan. She has a Bachelor's in Architecture and Planning from the NED University of Engineering and Technology and an M.Phil in Art and Design from the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture where she currently also teaches in the Architecture department as an Assistant Professor. Her research interests lie in ideas of spirituality, architectural phenomenology, representational practices, and the poetics of space. She is interested in the phenomenological frameworks of research and rethinking such frameworks from within the context of Islamic philosophy.



Atiab Fatima Rehman,
NCA, Class of 2024. *Bibi
Pak Daman: A Case
Study of Women's
Religious and Spiritual
Agency in Shrines*

Abstract:

This paper investigates the Bibi Pak Daman shrine in Lahore, Pakistan, as a place of female agency and empowerment, particularly emphasizing its significance in religious practices and community building for women. This paper argues that the female shrine of Bibi Pak Daman provides a unique space for empowerment, challenges patriarchal religious structures and offers women opportunities for self-expression and spiritual growth. This study was conducted using the ethnographic method of participant observation and by visual analysis of the space of the shrine. Key activities like making mannats or vows, washing the shrine, and engaging in communal dhikr sessions are examined for their importance in demonstrating spiritual and social agency. This paper also emphasizes the shrine's significance in creating female solidarity and providing a haven for people seeking solace or solutions to personal issues such as infertility. The findings add to broader conversations about gender, religion, and power dynamics in South Asia, highlighting Bibi Pak Daman as an important venue for women to navigate their spiritual and social identities within a patriarchal framework.



Syed Ahsen Raza, IVS,
Class of 2024. *The
Hyperpolis: A Case for
the Synthetic, Fantastic
and Irrational*

Abstract:

This paper explores the condition of 'hyper-reality' in the metropolitan city of the twenty-first century; where symbols have evolved, multiplied and mutated to the point that signifiers have taken a reality of their own and bear little to no resemblance to the originally signified. This paper argues that in the metropolitan culture of congestion, pastiche has replaced the real, 'the synthetic has overtaken the natural' diminishing the value of authenticity. I argue that everyday culture, which dies and is reborn in the speed of metropolitan flux, reaches a point of simulacrum (i.e. a copy that has become its own real object). My research traces architecture's evolution in this context, by going through archives of metropolitan cities and comparing their growth, from Las Vegas to Dubai to Karachi. The case of Bahria Town Karachi for instance demonstrates that while simulations like the Eiffel Tower replica are very real attractions for locals, they never reach the point of simulacrum within their sterile containment. Through a series of interviews and surveys I discover the value of pastiche, and speculate on strategies for turning these artificial fantasies into hyper-realities.



Gulzain, Beaconhouse
National University,
Class of 2024. *Naani
Pind di Vaar. Shrines
and Religious Practice
in Chhajjoke*

Abstract:

This paper attempts to disrupt the popular binary understanding of 'Good Islam' and 'Bad Islam'. Historically, shrines have been understood to be the sites of Sufism, folk religion and syncretism, whereas mosques and madrassas have been presented as spaces that promote fundamentalism. This paper explores four different shrines in the small village of Chhajjoke in Punjab, aiming to discourage the dichotomous understanding of Islam and monolithic image of shrines. It argues that shrines do not exhibit a singular mode of Islam that is often seen as all-inclusive and opposite to the teachings of the mosque. By using ethnographic means of participant observation and interviews, it draws attention towards shrines as spaces where different practices of religion in general and Islam in particular are negotiated. Furthermore, this research locates the historical impulse of erecting shrines in Punjab in its devotional roots and terms it as 'shrining' without creating a uniform category. Certain shrines maintain a madrasa and mosque teaching system within them while others adhere to simple practices of *urs* and *mannat*. Thus, this research aims to question the simplistic opposition between shrine and mosque/madrassa, hoping to provide a more nuanced approach to seeing shrines as religio-cultural spaces and discouraging the binarism prevalent in studies of Islam.



Hajra Qaiser and Wania Masood, NUST, Class of 2024. *Female Autonomy in the Private Sphere*

Abstract:

Women's autonomy within the private sphere remains an understudied area, with a significant research gap existing around the lived experiences of young, unmarried women. This gap impedes the development of effective policies and interventions that address restricted autonomy and achieve "empowerment". This novel exploration is particularly critical in the Pakistani context where gender norms, familial power structures, and societal expectations intersect to curtail young women's agency. This study, grounded in social constructionism and guided by a feminist lens, adopts the framework of relational autonomy to unpack how young women navigate control within the domain of their households. Through qualitative methods, such as interviews and surveys of women aged 18–25 in Islamabad, it explores both the perceived and external barriers to autonomy; the strategies women employ to negotiate these constraints; and the deeper cultural and structural factors that sustain them.





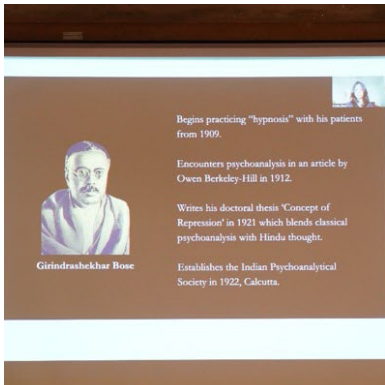
Panel 2: Self and Nation



Discussant:

Dr. Ali Gibran Siddiqui,
Assistant Professor,
Department of Social
Sciences and Liberal
Arts, Institute of Business
Administration, Karachi

Ali Gibran Siddiqui is Assistant Professor and History Cluster Lead at IBA Karachi and studies the Naqshbandi Sufis of the Timurid and Mughal Empires. His current book project focuses on how Abdullah Khan Firuz Jang (d.1644), a Central Asian Sufi commander, navigated the Mughal imperial system through strategic appeals to Timurid nostalgia, Turanian identity, and the feigned foreignness of Hindustan. Dr Siddiqui's other projects include an article on the role of miraculous dreams and spiritual monopolies in jade mining in sixteenth-century Kashghar, a book chapter on the acquisition of Indo-Islamic manuscripts held by the Princeton University Library and a co-authored typography of Mughal chilnam daggers. He is proficient in Urdu, English, Persian, Uzbek, and Russian.



Aman Qazi, LUMS, Class of 2024. *Psychoanalysis in Colonial India: Psychological and Nationalist Articulations of Indian Subjecthood*

Abstract:

The spread of psychoanalysis in colonial India is an understudied area in South Asian historiography, and one that warrants further exploration. Literature on the reception and adaptation of psychoanalysis by the Indian Psychoanalytical Society and its president, Dr. Girindrashekhhar Bose, is indicative of the biased nature of the classical psychoanalytic framework that merely considers the Western subject and locates the colonial subject as the Other — a non-self. Further, nationalist tension(s) that characterize the first half of the 20th century, in the lead up to Partition, coincide with the trickle of psychoanalytic discourse across colonial India. There is an interplay between the matter of finding a psychological self and a national self for the Indian (colonial) subject. My attempt is to explore two distinct articulations of psychoanalytic thought within the socio-cultural and colonial context of India, by Girindrashekhhar Bose in the 1920s/30s and by Sher Muhammad Akhtar during the late 1940s. Through this exploration, I seek to demonstrate how psychoanalytic discourse in India during this time is reflective of an evident grapple for identity — a concern that is experienced widely by the colonial subject and takes multiple forms — nationalist as well as psychological.



Musfira Khurshid, LUMS, Class of 2024. *Invoking God: Microhistories of Sedition during the Rowlatt Act Resistance in Colonial Lahore 1919*

Abstract:

While the events in Amritsar and reactions of famous leaders during the 1919 Rowlatt Act resistance have been sufficiently recorded, the anti-Rowlatt Act protests that have a rich history in Lahore remain undocumented, especially on a micro-level. This paper aims to bridge this gap by centering the struggles of people involved specifically in the anti-Rowlatt Act resistance, and more broadly in the Indian anti-colonial struggle. Acts of resistance by 'small' political workers – often ignored by the literature around the anti-Rowlatt Act protests – reflect their temporal and spatial understanding of Lahore, and can help explain their perspective on the politics of the time. Using colonial police intelligence reports, local newspapers, 'seditious' literature produced during this time, and many other vernacular sources as my primary sources, this paper traces microhistories through theories of violence, sovereignty, and religion to outline the different relationships that exist between violence, sovereignty, law, state power, and religion. Combining these theories through a Benjaminian reading, I argue that these revolutionaries carry out violence in Lahore's muhallas, colonial structures, Badshahi mosque, Bradlaugh Hall, Anarkali Bazaar, and many Androon streets, in a religious idiom, constructing a different order and relationship with their world that, albeit short lived, challenges the colonial order in a unique way.



Iman Ashraf, Habib University, Class of 2025. *From Diversity to Conformity: An Ontological Exploration of Language Politics and Identity Formation in British India*

Abstract:

This paper addresses the questions of identity formation and language politics in pre- and post-partition Pakistan to better comprehend the historical events and conditions that have shaped our current understanding of language. The three languages, Urdu, Hindi, and English, are the principal elements of concern for conducting an 'ontology of the present' through a genealogical investigation. Foucault's concepts of power, discourse and knowledge, form the theoretical foundations of this essay which argues that the British and later the Urdu-speaking elites employed specific tools and processes such as the Census, standardisation of languages and language teaching policies to ensure that they could exercise power and geographical identities became deeply entwined with religious and linguistic markers.



Rameen Salman, IBA, Class of 2024. *Framing the Boundary: An Understanding of the Nation in the Bollywood Cricket Film*

This paper undertakes a postcolonial reading of a select few Bollywood cricket films to investigate how the nation or the idea of nationhood is constructed in them. Through an understanding of the history of cricket and its decolonization in India, it analyses the films based on a recognition of the value of cricket as a narrative device and a national symbol despite its colonial origins. The primary texts used in this paper include *Lagaan* (2001, dir. Ashutosh Gowariker), *Patiala House* (2001, dir. Nikkhil Advani), *83* (2021, dir. Kabir Khan), and *Shabaash Mithu* (2022, dir. Sirijit Mukherji). This project explores recurring themes, ideas, motifs or tropes in these films that aid the possible understanding of the nation and examines whether their particular narrative structures are conducive to the building of national sentiments. The postcolonial framework is chosen as per the author's positionality as a Pakistani, reading cultural projects created in India. The framework draws on the work of Homi Bhabha, whose ideas of mimicry and sly civility are marked by ambivalence, offering room for theoretical interpretation. This paper recognizes the conflation of the team with the nation, the significance of spatiality or temporality within the post colonial period, the reliance on particular figures to ground narratives as well as the idea of the nation being in a state of constant reinterpretation as the salient findings of its analysis.





Panel 3: Partitions and their Fragments



Discussant:

Palvashay Sethi,

Lecturer, Department
of Social Sciences and
Liberal Arts, Institute of
Business Administration,
Karachi

Palvashay Sethi is a writer and a teacher. Her work has been published in Fence, Barrelhouse, minor literature[s], Queen Mob's Teahouse, The Aleph Review, DAWN, and Hybrid. She began digitally serialising a novella about a writer named Naintara Kazmi that's written against the background of the Bangladesh Liberation War on @sannataarchive in 2020; an excerpt of the novella was a finalist for the Calvino Prize at the University of Louisville in 2022. Her recent work, tentatively titled, "Humera Auntie" was shortlisted for The A.C. Bose Grant for South Asian Speculative Literature in 2025. She is currently working on a collection of experimental short stories.



Ashmal Aryn Essa,

IBA, Class of 2025.
*Post-Partition State-
Periphery Relationships:
Comparing
Gilgit-Baltistan and
Pakistan, and Jammu
& Kashmir and India*

Abstract:

This paper looks at Gilgit Baltistan in Pakistan, and Jammu and Kashmir in India, both of which have unique demographics and statuses in their respective states while also having contentious and quite often volatile relationships with them. The paper looks at the background of how this situation came to be, by first tracing the history of the region from the conquest of the greater region by the Sikh Empire to the division of the region in the 1948 Indo-Pakistan War, and then looking at the respective histories of the two territories within and with their administering states. It then looks at actions taken by both the ruling powers – which wish to assimilate and integrate the territories according to their narrative – and by the locals of the territories – who wish to either assert or preserve their autonomy, self-governance, and unique identities.



Zehra Shabbir Khan, IVS, Class of 2024. *Material Migrants: Archiving the Pakistan-Bangladesh Partition of 1971 through its Material Remnants*

Abstract:

This research archives the Pakistan-Bangladesh Partition of 1971 through the memory and material remnants carried by Urdu-speaking/Bihari migrants as they fled from East Pakistan to West Pakistan amidst the civil war, presenting personal narratives of the great displacement which resulted from the Partition. Through in-depth oral history interviews with migrants and their descendants, documentation and object analysis of the tangible materials of their migration, this research delves into how surviving migrant objects speak to the event of Partition. Each object by virtue of its own history — its original place and purpose in the life of its owner, their owner's motivations behind selecting and carrying it during the migration, the emotions it evokes and its current significance — adds to a more layered understanding of the Partition. The findings reveal that all the respondents recall a highly structured chronology of events that corresponds with the dominant history of Partition. On the other hand, personal histories are more difficult to recover. While spaces and objects lost to the Partition are remembered with varying detail, those carried through the migration can be forgotten due to the passage of time and therefore present a challenge to the archival process. Despite these hurdles, common threads emerge in the types of objects preserved, serving as mementoes of pre- and post-Partition lives. Furthermore, the historically fraught dichotomy between Urdu-speaking/Bihari and Bengali identities, is complicated through narratives of shared joy and companionship amidst the turmoil. This research provides insights into the complexities of dominant and personal historiography, memory, material culture, and communal relations in the context of Partition.



Zoha Binte Ashfaq, IVS,
Class of 2024. *The
Impact of Ethnic Ten-
sions in Karachi during
the 1980s and 1990s on
the Lived Experiences of
the Muhajir Community*

Abstract:

This paper seeks to explore the everyday realities of the Muhajir population during a pivotal period in Karachi's socio-political history. Beyond contributing to academic discourse, this study aims to cultivate empathy and offer a more nuanced understanding of the complex narratives that have shaped the city's political landscape. While existing scholarship provides important context on Karachi's broader political and ethnic dynamics, it often overlooks the lived experiences of the Muhajir community. This paper employs a mixed-methods approach, including qualitative interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and quantitative data. A critical discourse analysis of existing literature supplements the primary data to contextualize the broader socio-political shifts in Karachi. To frame the spatial dimensions of these experiences, Henri Lefebvre's theory of lived space is used to examine how Muhajirs interpreted and navigated their environments in the face of escalating violence and state surveillance. Key findings reveal a shift in the emotional and spatial landscape of the community - from spaces of belonging to sites of fear. Narratives of disillusionment, resistance, and reconfigured identity highlight how MQM's trajectory fractured the very community it sought to unify. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how political movements shape not only public discourse but also the private, everyday realities of marginalized groups.





Panel 4: Embodiment and Informality in Creative Subcultures



Discussant:

Syed Ali Mehdi Zaidi,
PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology,
Stanford University, USA

Syed Ali Mehdi Zaidi is writing his dissertation for a PhD in Anthropology at Stanford University, focusing on the social life of heat. His work attempts to articulate the problem of environmental catastrophe from the perspective of the third world. He is currently a Global Fellow at Habib University where he teaches courses on Modernity and on Environmental Anthropology. His future offerings include courses on Medical Anthropology and the Social Life of Death.



Omair Danish Rafiq,
IBA, Class of 2024.
'Jailbreakers, Jugaarus,
and Jigars': Video Game
Piracy and the Gaming
Community in Karachi

Abstract:

This paper studies video game piracy using critical media theories and methods. Drawing on postcolonial and decolonial perspectives, this paper argues for piracy as a key component of the Pakistani gaming community. Beginning with foundational definitions, this research uncovers the vague parameters and socio-cultural understandings of piracy. It argues for fluidity and extra-legality while thinking of piracy not as a form of theft, but as a powerful tool towards generating equitable media. It critiques the hegemony of global, usually North Atlantic, copyright regimes, brought on by laws such as the TRIPS Agreement in 1995 by the World Trade Organization. It observes how piracy extends itself into digital media, enabling informal or shadow economies that challenge dominant narratives of intellectual property. The primary focus of this study is Rainbow Centre, a market-bazaar which has been a key hub of piracy since its genesis in the 80's in Karachi, Pakistan. It examines its evolution from a traditional media market selling audio-visual material such as films, shows, and music to a hub for gaming retailers. The theory of 'jugaar', observations, and interviews help illuminate the Rainbow Centre's transformative impact on the state of piracy. It also studies the making of a modern Pakistani gamer, through interviews and argues for an understanding of piracy as not just the preferred way of playing games, but the only way. Tracing piracy to arcades, it concludes that the success of Pakistan's esports presence is partly, and gaming is wholly, enabled by piracy.



Eman Farhan, IVS, Class of 2024. The Moving Bride: A Feminist Analysis of Decorated Buses in Shireen Jinnah Colony, Karachi.

Abstract:

This paper presents a feminist analysis of the decorated buses of Shireen Jinnah Colony, Karachi, colloquially described as chalti hui dulhan or moving brides. Drawing on interviews with drivers and artisans, and critical frameworks from feminist theory and material culture studies, the research examines the processes through which these vehicles are feminized via elaborate ornamentation, particularly the practice of chamakpatti. It argues that the feminization of buses reflects broader socio-cultural constructions of gender and ownership within Pakistan's transportation industry, wherein the male-dominated practice of vehicle decoration enacts a symbolic relationship between masculinity and feminized objects. The study further explores how the ritualistic and communal nature of bus decoration parallels bridal preparation ceremonies, revealing a material praxis of care, identity, and affection. Situating the decorated bus as a gendered technological artefact, this paper critically interrogates how language, ritual, and aesthetic labor contribute to the formation of gendered imaginaries and the negotiation of masculinity in contemporary Pakistani society.



Sofia Sarfraz and Eman Khalid, LUMS, Class of 2025. Raags to Riches: The Economic Tale of Classical Musicians in Pakistan

Abstract:

Classical music, in both its original and popular forms, is a central facet of Pakistani cultural identity. Whether in the shape of corporate curation of global hits through Coke Studio or the highly politicized *naghmas* heard during political rallies at D Chowk in Islamabad, music has long served as an expressive anchor. In the narrow streets of Lahore's Old City, the last vestiges of families preserving centuries-old musical traditions are slowly fading away. Extremism and societal pushback continue to marginalize these performers, despite their continued role in shaping Pakistan's cultural sphere. Their harsh reality is marked by institutional neglect and entrenched hierarchies as their livelihoods are deeply enmeshed in the informal economy. In this paper we seek to answer two critical questions: How do classical musicians navigate the informal economy to sustain their craft? And what possibilities exist for collective mobilization within the structures of informality they inhabit?

Participant observations and semi-structured interviews across private and state-sponsored institutions in Lahore and Islamabad were conducted to gain insight into the intersecting roles of hierarchy, kinship, and resource allocation in shaping access to opportunities for classical musicians. Our research reveals how gharana-based privilege, gendered disparities, and religious marginalization determine access to economic opportunities and reinforce exclusion. Even digital platforms offer limited pathways to bypass internal obstacles especially to most female musicians. Our findings highlight how internal hierarchies, systemic neglect, and global market dynamics restrict the potential for collective mobilization, leaving classical musicians at the mercy of informal structures.



Muhammad Abrar,
NCA, Class of 2024, The
Construction and
Performance of
Masculinity in Sindhi
Malh: A Cultural Analysis

Abstract:

Malh, an ancient Sindhi belt wrestling tradition dating back to the Indus Valley Civilization, has long been a cornerstone of Sindh's cultural identity. Despite its historical significance and status as the provincial sport of Sindh, the practice of *Malh* is on the decline as it is increasingly perceived as being out of step with contemporary ideals. This research frames *Malh* within broader discussions of cultural identity and masculinity, arguing that the sport's marginalization reflects larger societal tensions between tradition and modernity. It uses field observations to investigate the socio-cultural factors impacting the sport and focuses in particular on how traditional masculinity is constructed and performed within the sport. The highly physical and competitive nature of *Malh* is strongly interlinked with ideals of male strength, dominance, and endurance, which are showcased in the wrestling arena. The wrestler's body becomes a symbol of power, discipline, and honor, reinforced through rigorous training regimens and a lifestyle centered on cultivating physical strength and mastery. Homosocial bonds among wrestlers balance competition with camaraderie. Wrestlers, who often belong to marginalized communities have a complex relationship with the audience, whose gaze both empowers and pressures them to represent masculine ideals. Their reactions, cheers, and rewards validate and intensify these displays of masculinity, and transform the arena into a communal stage where identity and power are publicly negotiated and reaffirmed.





Gallery









