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Organized by KET's V. G. Vaze College, Mulund

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*Special Issue of “Two-Day National Multidisciplinary Conference on
Fashion-I-S-T-A-S” 2025*

Organized by KET's V. G. Vaze College, Mulund

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EDITORIAL NOTE

Fashion today transcends the realm of clothing and aesthetics. It is a phenomenon engrained in the cultural, social, economic, political, and technological matrix of contemporary life. The Two-Day National Multidisciplinary Conference on Fashion-I-S-T-A-S 2025, organised by V.G. Vaze College with financial support from the ICSSR (WRC) had its thematic emphasis on Fashion: Innovation, Sustainability, Trends, Avenues, Society. The conference was a timely academic intervention aimed at synthesizing the multiple dimensions of fashion into a coherent scholarly narrative. By positioning fashion at the intersection of diverse disciplines, the conference aligns with the evolving demands of knowledge production and the interdisciplinary frameworks of modern scholarship.

At its core, fashion is a powerful modality of identity articulation. It codifies and communicates individual and collective selves, rooted in ethnicity, nationality, subcultures, and philosophical affiliations, while also being shaped by socio-political hierarchies of class, caste, and gender. As such, fashion is not merely a statement of style but a socio-cultural text, legible to those trained to interpret its symbols and codes. The conceptual note of the conference, rightly emphasizes this semiotic function of fashion and foregrounds its relevance beyond the superficiality often attributed to it. The epistemological expansion of fashion studies in recent decades demonstrates its applicability across domains. From history and psychology to economics and environmental science, fashion functions as both subject and method.

The proposed conference offered a much-needed platform for deconstructing the manifold roles of fashion; as an economic engine, a vehicle of cultural transmission, and a site of ideological contestation. It invited scholars and practitioners alike to interrogate the dialectics of tradition and modernity, consumerism and consciousness, exclusivity and inclusivity within the fashion ecosystem.

A key thematic strand of the conference was the historical and political evolution of fashion. Fashion history is not linear; it is cyclical, often retrogressive, yet constantly innovating through cultural assimilation and resistance. The politics of fashion, visible in debates around cultural appropriation, dress codes, and modesty regulations reveals how garments become tools of control and resistance. In societies such as India, sartorial choices have long been intertwined with nationalist discourses, colonial legacies, and postcolonial identity formation. Examining the socio-political utility of clothing across epochs opens avenues for understanding fashion as a site of power and negotiation.

Equally important was the recognition of fashion's economic centrality. With the global fashion industry generating revenues worth trillions, fashion is not peripheral to economic discourse. The attention of the conference to retail and merchandising, consumer behavior, branding, and e-commerce reflected the critical role in global trade and employment. Furthermore, the impact of fashion tourism, where cities and regions leverage their sartorial heritage to attract consumers and tourists, adds another dimension to the fashion-commerce nexus. Such intersections merited academic analysis, especially in light of the increasing digitization and platformization of the fashion marketplace.

The inclusion of psychological and social inclusivity within the discourse of fashion is a welcome move towards a more ethically engaged scholarship. Fashion is known to influence self-image and mental well-being; the phenomenon of body shaming, sizeism, and ableism within mainstream fashion is gradually being challenged through movements for body positivity and inclusive design. By examining how fashion shaped and is shaped by psychological dynamics, the conference showed the affective power of clothing. Additionally, issues of gender fluidity and LGBTQ+ representation in fashion challenge heteronormative and binary frameworks, enabling the democratization of style were also discussed.

Among the most pressing concerns in contemporary fashion discourse is sustainability. The fashion industry is often critiqued for its role in environmental degradation ranging from textile waste and water pollution to carbon emissions. The dedicated focus of the conference on Eco-Evolution and legal considerations addressed this head-on. The environmental footprint of fashion can no longer be ignored; sustainable sourcing, circular design, ethical labor practices, and green certifications must be central to industry reform. Additionally, the legal architecture that governs intellectual property, labor rights, and environmental compliance needs scholarly attention, and the conference addressed this. Protecting designer rights while ensuring worker dignity and ecological responsibility is a complex balancing act that the conference explored.

Another innovative thematic focus is the fusion of food and fashion, and the synergy between fashion and nature, including wildlife and botanical aesthetics. These represent a novel epistemic turn in fashion studies, where culinary cultures, ecological motifs, and organic materials are not merely design inspirations but are embedded into the very philosophies of sustainable living. The exploration of edible fashion, nature-inspired textiles, and biophilic aesthetics gestures towards an emerging eco-

humanism in design thought were crucial discussions in redirecting fashion from being an extractive enterprise to one that is regenerative and mindful.

The role of technology and science in reshaping fashion was yet another important conference axis. With innovations like 3D printing, wearable tech, augmented reality (AR), and artificial intelligence (AI), fashion is undergoing a tectonic shift. AI is transforming everything from predictive analytics in design to automated journalism in fashion reporting. Digital avatars and virtual runways are redefining fashion consumption and aesthetics. The integration of STEM fields into fashion prepares the ground for fashion education that is attuned to Industry 5.0 realities. Discussions on biomechanics, ergonomics, and color science further enriched the technoscientific discourse.

The pedagogical focus on fashion education addresses a long-standing gap in curriculum innovation. Preparing students for the global fashion industry requires a holistic, interdisciplinary education that incorporates business, art, technology, and sustainability. The challenge lies in designing syllabi that are both rooted in local traditions and responsive to global trends. Fashion institutes must not only train designers but also nurture critical thinkers and change agents who can navigate ethical quandaries and technological shifts with intellectual rigor and creativity. The conference addressed these aspects as well.

In conclusion, Fashion-I-S-T-A-S 2025 was more than a conference; it was a clarion call for repositioning fashion as a serious academic pursuit. By treating fashion as a multifaceted domain that encompasses aesthetics, ethics, economics, and ecology, the event invited a paradigm shift in how fashion is theorized, practiced, and taught.

This special issue of the journal brings together diverse perspectives that examine fashion as both a cultural artifact and a dynamic force shaping modern life. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Ms. Nanda Rupnar for designing the cover page of the journal.

In Saree 2.0: Redefining Heritage and Empowerment through Fashion, Preeta Nilesh and Neeta Mehta, reinterpret the saree as a living tradition that balances continuity and change. The paper anchors the volume thematically, examining the transformation of the saree in form and meaning, from an ancestral garment to a contemporary expression of empowerment and identity. This notion of reimagining the traditional recurs in Social Networking and YouTube: Reviving the Art of Upcycled Saris and Sari Draping, an analysis by Satwant Balse of how YouTube and social media have catalysed a resurgence in sari draping and upcycling, promoting both

sustainability and creativity. Rina Puradkar's paper on the Paithani, *The Saga of Mahavastra of Maharashtra: Paithani adds depth to this conversation, celebrating the elegance and regional pride embedded in one of Maharashtra's most iconic weaves.*

The intersection of fashion with identity and politics forms another critical strand. In *Inferring the Politics of Fashion*, Shilpa Suryawanshi deconstructs the wardrobes of Indian political figures to reveal how attire becomes a tool of ideological communication. A complementary historical narrative is offered by Snehal Nagtilak. In her paper, *The Suit of Power: Tracing the History of the Safari Suit in India*, Snehal traces the rise and fall of the safari suit as a sartorial symbol of Indian postcolonial masculinity. Harshana Nikam further explores how fashion historically shaped ideals of femininity, focusing on 19th-century shapewear and its restrictive norms in her study titled, *Constructing Femininity: A Study of Historical Shapewear of the 19th Century and Its Significance in Western Fashion.*

Empowerment, particularly of women and marginalized groups, is central to several contributions. Sharvari Pendse in, *Empowering Women Through Fashion*, explores how fashion becomes a language of self-expression and resistance, enabling women to reclaim agency and redefine femininity. In a joint paper, *Fashion Matters: Getting a Grip and Shaping Identities for the Physically Challenged*, Sharvari Gupte and Preeta Nilesh turn the spotlight on adaptive fashion, emphasizing its role in empowering the physically challenged through functional yet expressive clothing. Similarly, Priyal Karania's work on flexible dress codes *Understanding The Impact of Flexible Dress Codes as a New Trend at Workplace*, reveals how workplaces are becoming more inclusive and accommodating of cultural and personal identity.

The volume also investigates the economic, environmental, and digital dimensions of fashion. Jui Kadvekar and Deep Pathare's study on Mumbai's thrifting culture, *Threads of Change: A Historical and Cultural Perspective on Thrifting in Mumbai* connects sustainable consumption with urban identity. In tandem, Snehal Chavan and Vaidehi Raut critically examine the environmental implications of textile waste and fast fashion in their paper, *Reducing Fashion's Environmental Impact: A Study of Textile Waste Management*, urging a shift toward circularity and responsible production. Sustainability also intersects with comfort and well-being in a joint paper by Neha Satoliya and Meera Surve. Their paper on the "comfort revolution" in fashion trends titled, *Redefining Style: The Comfort Revolution in Modern Fashion Trends* reflects a consumer-driven demand for ease, style, and environmental consciousness.

The idea of fashion as subtle power is explored in Understanding Quiet Luxury in Fashion by Neha Shirsat and Shilpi Sagar, where HBO's Succession becomes a lens to decode how understated, unbranded clothing signifies wealth and authority. Likewise, Sukhada Khambekar's paper on fashion tourism, Travel Destinations in India influencing Textile Trends reveals how regional textiles are not only preserved but popularized through travel and social media, further blurring the lines between culture, commerce, and couture.

Interdisciplinary approaches enrich the final section of the journal. Rajesh Mane's unique study, Fashioning Design: An Analysis of Automotive Industry, draws parallels between automotive and fashion design, demonstrating how form, function, and branding converge across industries. In an adjacent social space, In their joint paper, Emerging Trend of Empowering Fitness from Home: Case Study of Habuild (India's First Habit Building Program), Neeta Mehta and Sharvari Gupte study the rise of virtual fitness platforms like Habuild, examining how digital fashion and wellness culture intersect in post-pandemic India. In yet another joint study, The Intersection of Emerging Trends, Cultural Norms and Child Sexual Abuse in India: A Critical Media Analysis, Neeta Mehta with Anushka Bhat offer a sobering perspective on the role of media in perpetuating the sexualisation of children in fashion-oriented reality shows, demanding critical accountability. In the last paper of this journal, Single-Session Therapy in the Indian Context, Ranjana Nikte explores Single-Session Therapy as providing a psychological counterpoint, reminding us that identity and self-image, often expressed through fashion, are also deeply linked to mental well-being.

This curated volume demonstrates that fashion is not a frivolous field but a complex, interdisciplinary arena where aesthetics meet politics, industry meets ethics, and personal choices reflect broader societal currents. Each paper in this issue contributes to a deeper understanding of how garments, trends, and choices are entwined to give us an idea of who we are, and who we aspire to become.

- Editors

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Dr. Vishakha was the visiting faculty for BSc Economics and B.A. LLB Courses at Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies in the subject of Political Science. She has been the coordinator and also visiting faculty at the Center for Distance and Online Education (CDOE) at the Mumbai University. She has authored books for CDOE for the Bachelor's and Master's courses in Political Science.

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Dr. Preeta Nilesh is the Principal of V.G. Vaze College (Autonomous) which she joined in 1984 as Assistant Professor. She was promoted to the post of Professor in June 2017 and has been Principal of Vaze College (Autonomous) since 2021. She was awarded PhD for her study on Law and Social Change in the 19thc Bombay. She has been Keynote & Plenary speaker and resourced at conferences and published research papers in journals of repute. Prof. Preeta has to her credit an edited volume, Advancing Human Security: Perspectives on Global Governance. She has co-edited 'Revisiting World War 1: Centenary Hindsight' in August 2015. She also has a book on the first English medium school for girls in the Bombay Presidency, 'The Alexandra Girls' Education Institution'. Prof. Preeta also has to her credit an edited compilation of a National Conference on Cricket.

Her areas of research interest include women's engagement with law, education and civil society. She is also interested in Culture studies: festivals, fountains, food, restaurants fashion and international relations. Professor Preeta has completed a number of post-doctoral research projects funded by the University of Mumbai, UGC, The Asiatic Society of Mumbai and has also been the recipient of the Awabai Wadia Post-doctoral Research Fellowship. She was invited by the United States Department of State to participate in a four- week International Visitor Leadership Program in May 2009 during the course of which, she interacted with various members of the US Senate.

She was also invited to the Nordic Institute, Copenhagen, for a work-cum study program in 2010 and as Professor-Mentor to the Dubai College of Higher Technologies in 2010 and 2011.

Professor Preeta Nilesh has also been invited as Plenary Speaker, Resource Person and Chairperson to various national and international conferences including the University of Sacramento, California, (USA), the University of Fudan, Shanghai, (China), Mansfield College, Oxford, (United Kingdom) and the International Institute of Asian Studies, Leiden (The Netherlands) to name a few.

She has a number of publications in national and international journals of repute.