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# POP DAPP

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Beauty  
AS A NARRATIVE  
Elton J. Fernandez

Suruj Rajkhowa & Nin Kala  
THE VISIONARY VANGUARDS

Shaping Creative Landscapes  
Victoria Krundysheva

AASHNA CHOUDHARY  
A Vision Rooted In Empathy &  
Leadership

*Empowerment Through Expression*  
DIANDRA SOARES

Meiyang Chang  
BALANCING TALENTS  
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TALES THROUGH THE LENS  
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UNSTOPPABLE, UNAPOLOGETIC, & VERSATILE

*Adah Sharma*

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*Art Of Conceptual Fashion Photography*

SYMPHONY OF STYLE, LUXURY, & AUTHENTICITY  
*Tina Kakkad*



# POPP DAPP | What's Where?

- 07 Rhea Gupte | CRAFTING WORLDS, CREATING CHANGE
- 09 Ritnika Nayan | AMPLIFYING INDEPENDENT VOICES
- 11 Madhusudan Patidar | CLIMBING HEIGHTS, SOARING DREAMS, & SAVING THE PLANET
- 13 Diandra Soares | EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EXPRESSION
- 16 Yashita Chandrashekhar | WEAVING EMPOWERMENT THROUGH CREATIVITY & LEGAL ADVOCACY
- 18 Tina Kakkad | SYMPHONY OF STYLE, LUXURY, AUTHENTICITY
- 20 BEAUTY SPREAD BY GINA BADHEN
- 24 Elton J. Fernandez | BEAUTY AS A NARRATIVE: A CANVAS OF PERSONAL EXPRESSION
- 26 Gourab Ganguli | TALES THROUGH THE LENS: AN EXCLUSIVE INSIGHT WITH GOURAB GANGULI
- 28 Victoria Krundysheva | SHAPING CREATIVE LANDSCAPES
- 30 Aashna Choudhary | A VISION ROOTED IN EMPATHY AND LEADERSHIP
- 32 Narayani Vastra | BLENDING HERITAGE WITH MODERN ELEGANCE
- 35 COVER STORY | Adah Sharma | UNSTOPPABLE, UNAPOLOGETIC, & VERSATILE
- 41 Megna Mukherjee | NAVIGATING ARTISTIC REALMS
- 43 Yalda Zazai | CRAFTING IDENTITY THROUGH STYLE & EXPRESSION
- 45 Juhi Bhatt | REDEFINING AUTHENTICITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE
- 47 Shoven Shah | REVOLUTIONIZING THE FUTURE OF ENTERTAINMENT WITH TRIBEVIBE
- 49 Arpita Akhanda | THE EMBODIMENT OF MEMORY
- 51 FASHION SPREAD | 'EUPHONIC' BY MANNAT GUPTA
- 59 Meiyang Chang | BALANCING TALENTS & BREAKING BARRIERS
- 62 Angela | THE ANGELIC SYNERGY OF MUSIC, MODELING, & MEANING
- 65 Tarun Kalyani | ART OF CONCEPTUAL FASHION PHOTOGRAPHY
- 68 CELESTIAL TRAILBLAZERS by AVIJIT CHOUDHARY | Tarot, Crystals, & much more.
- 70 Suruj Rajkhowa | THE VISIONARY VANGUARD
- 72 Nin Kala | BRIDGING THE GAPS IN FASHION
- 74 Nishtha Gandhi | REDEFINING AUTHENTICITY, STYLE, & CONFIDENCE
- 76 Ishaan Nair | A PORTRAIT OF MODERN POLYMATH
- 78 Heeta Lakhani | IGNITING CLIMATE ACTION
- 80 EDITORIAL SPREAD | 'G A L A' By HARSHIT GUPTA



## POPP DAPP

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At a juncture when identity, memory, and history often converge in profound and dynamic ways, **Arpita Akhanda** stands out as a visionary voice. A master of intertwining personal and institutional narratives, Akhanda challenges the boundaries of memory-making by transforming her body into a living archive. Through her multi-disciplinary works, which span performance, photography, and paper weaving, she delves deep into the intersections of colonial and postcolonial histories, intergenerational trauma, and the search for belonging. In this exclusive interview with Popp Dapp Fashion Magazine, Akhanda invites us into her creative process and intellectual journey, exploring how memory—both personal and collective—shapes her practice.

### **The Body as a Vessel: Memory Collecting Through Art**

Akhanda's body becomes a canvas, an archive that collects, preserves, and transmits memories across time. Her description of the body as a "memory collector" is both striking and profound. It encapsulates her artistic mission of exploring the tangible and intangible traces that colonial and postcolonial histories leave on individuals and families. As Akhanda explains, "I perceive the body as a vessel that holds the physical traces and psychological imprints of both colonial and postcolonial histories. It acts as a living archive, preserving and transmitting recollections across generations." This idea resonates powerfully in her performance **खेदा** (Khēda), which reenacts a pivotal memory of her grandfather's protest against the Partition of India. Through this act, she transforms her body into a conduit, connecting past and present, allowing deeply personal archives of resistance and history to come alive. Her artistic expression becomes not merely a recollection of history but a visceral engagement with it, a tribute to the body as both witness and participant in historical events.

# THE EMBODIMENT OF MEMORY

*Arpita Akhanda's Exploration of Identity & History*



### Intergenerational Memory and the Quest for Belonging

The impact of intergenerational memory on Akhanda's understanding of home and belonging is palpable throughout her work. Her family's migration during the 1947 Partition of India serves as a central theme that weaves through her art, questioning the concept of "home" and "belonging" in a world fractured by borders and political upheaval. Akhanda recounts her connection to her paternal grandfather's photograph album, which documents his family's journey before and after the Partition. This album became a "living history" for Akhanda, transforming her understanding of home from a physical space to a collection of memories, objects, and silences that connect her to the land her ancestors were forced to leave behind. "These intergenerational memories have shaped my understanding of 'home' while challenging its very notion. For my family, home transcends physical space; it resides in the memories and artifacts that connect us to the places we left behind," she reflects. In her work *I Am Not a Refugee*, Akhanda revisits these themes of displacement and longing, using *mise-en-scène* and staged photography to embody the memories of her grandparents, depicting them in traditional garments as they stand before barbed wire—a stark symbol of the borders that now divide what was once their home. Through these artistic choices, Akhanda invites viewers to engage with the complexities of migration and the search for belonging, underscoring the lasting impact of political and social upheavals on personal identities.

### Mise-en-Scène: Reconstructing Memories of Displacement

*Mise-en-scène* plays a pivotal role in Akhanda's practice, enabling her to bring both personal and collective histories to life. By reconstructing family memories through photography and paper weaving, Akhanda bridges the gap between the physical and the ephemeral, giving form to memories that might otherwise be lost. "In my work, I reconstruct the ephemeral memories passed down through oral histories, juxtaposing them with the physical archives left behind by my grandfather," she shares. Her performance *The Living Scar*, where she marks her body with tattoos commemorating the announcement of the Radcliffe Line—the boundary that divided India and Pakistan—further illustrates how her body becomes a site of historical memory. This act challenges institutional histories, which often sanitize or obscure personal experiences of trauma, forcing viewers to confront the physical and emotional scars left behind by such historical events. Akhanda's practice is as much about confronting institutional narratives as it is about honoring personal memories. By reconstructing her family's undocumented past through *mise-en-scène*, she challenges the way dominant historical narratives overlook personal stories, particularly those of marginalized communities. Her body, in this sense, becomes both a medium and a message, a living testament to the power of memory to resist erasure.

### Weaving Memories: A Metaphor for Lost Narratives

For Akhanda, weaving is not just a physical act; it is a profound metaphor for the fragmented and often obscured narratives of colonial and postcolonial histories. Through her process of paper weaving, she combines personal archives—photographs, letters, and oral histories—with institutional archives, creating a "third narrative" that interrogates identity, displacement, and the loss of memory. "I view paper weaving as a transformative process that intertwines the warp of personal memories with the weft of institutional narratives, creating a fabric of history that is pixelated, fragmented, and often obscured," she explains. This technique is exemplified in *The Dissected Souvenir I*, where Akhanda creates a parallel family album, weaving together photographs from her grandfather's collection with official telegrams from the time of the Partition. This layering of personal and institutional narratives invites viewers to question the

boundaries of history and memory, challenging them to consider the stories that have been forgotten or silenced.

### Engaging Audiences Across Histories

Akhanda's work transcends cultural and historical boundaries, inviting audiences from diverse backgrounds to engage with her performances. During her piece *Transitory Body*, performed in various cities across Europe, audiences shared their memories with her, creating a powerful exchange of personal and collective histories. This act of memory-sharing highlights the universal nature of human experiences—regardless of geography or background, we all carry stories that shape our identities. "I believe that inviting viewers into this space fosters empathy and encourages them to reflect on their own histories while connecting with those who have different experiences," Akhanda states. This collective sharing of memories enriches her performances, making them not just an artistic expression but also a site of community dialogue and healing.

### Pixelation as a Metaphor for Lost Histories

Akhanda's use of pixelated and blurred visual language serves as a metaphor for the fragmented nature of historical narratives, particularly those that have been marginalized or forgotten. "Just as pixels form a larger image, various facets of history are often scattered, complicating the quest to piece together a complete story," she explains. This fragmented visual language resonates deeply with her exploration of colonial and postcolonial histories, where personal and familial dimensions are often obscured by dominant institutional narratives.

### Bridging Personal and Collective Histories

Through her work, Arpita Akhanda aspires to bridge the gap between personal experiences and broader historical discourses, creating a space where overlooked narratives can come to light. Her artistic practice challenges conventional notions of memory, encouraging audiences to engage with the complexities of identity, belonging, and history. By weaving together personal archives with institutional histories, Akhanda's work becomes a powerful exploration of the ways in which memory, art, and history intersect, offering new perspectives on the past and its ongoing influence on the present. ■