

for both of us

Photographs by
Avani Rai and Raghu Rai



FOR BOTH OF US

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Cover Image: **Avani Rai,**
Mumbai Landscapes,
Undated.

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With Images by
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INTRODUCTION

This publication accompanies the exhibition *For Both of Us* shown in 2025. It brings together the works of photographer and filmmaker **Avani Rai** (b. 1992, Mumbai, India) and her father, renowned photojournalist **Raghu Rai** (b. 1942, Jhang, India), in a visual dialogue across generations.

This exhibition initiates a conversation on how memory, legacy, and lived experiences shape

artistic vision, tracing both continuities and disruptions in their practices. Through photography and film, both father and daughter navigate personal and political landscapes, capturing India's evolving identity.

This project surveys how visual inheritance is carried, disrupted, and reimaged, prompting reflection on the intricate ties between sight, memory, and belonging across generations.



Raghu Rai, *Rush at Local Train Church Gate, Mumbai, 1996.*

Avani Rai, *Two women by the sea overlooking the Mumbai skyline, Mumbai, Undated.*

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SACRED GEOGRAPHIES

Avani Rai, *Women in traditional attire in Gurdaspur, Punjab, Undated.*



Raghu and Avani both explore spirituality, rituals, and sacred landscapes in their visual work, yet their approaches reflect different perspectives and times. Raghu gravitates towards photographing large public scenes, like the crowded ghats in Varanasi¹, Sufi shrines², and the Mahakumbh Mela³, highlighting the layered coexistence of India's spiritual traditions.

In contrast, Avani's work is quieter and introspective, focusing on intimate moments and details. Her images evoke memory and atmosphere with emotional sensitivity and an embodied sense of place.

In Sanskrit, Varanasi is known as the City of Light, and a photographer would have to spend a couple of lifetimes here before running out of things to photo-

graph. This is where both father and daughter travelled to photograph together for their first shared photo assignment, learn from each other, and maybe even grow a bit closer. Amid the bustle of this ancient city, a quieter drama unfolded behind the lens: How would Avani navigate the delicate path between listening to her father's hard-earned advice — he, who has photographed spiritual icons like Mother Teresa and the Dalai Lama — while trusting her own creative vision?

This chapter takes a closer look at how both artists engage with India's spiritual cultures. From sacred cities to portraits of spiritual leaders, their distinct yet interconnected approaches chart a dialogue between tradition and transformation, personal memory and collective identity.

“Even though I’m trying to be my own, all the time and every time I photograph, he is still in my mind.”

- Avani Rai



Avani Rai, Ganga Aarti ceremony on the banks of Ganges river, Varanasi, Undated.

Raghu Rai, Worshipping Ganga, Varanasi, 2007.



Raghu Rai, *Evening Prayer*
Jama Masjid, New Delhi,
1982.



Avani Rai, *Young boys jump into the Ganges River, Varanasi, Undated.*

Avani Rai, *Barefoot reflections, Varanasi, 2022.*



Avani Rai, *Two men performing a sacred hindu ritual in the Ganges River, Varanasi, Undated.*

Two men perform a Hindu ritual bath in the sacred waters of the Ganges River in Varanasi. This meditative act, believed to purify the soul and honor both God and ancestors, reflects the river's living presence as Mother Ganga, a symbol of purity, redemption, and liberation.

From Avani's archive, the photograph embodies her sensitivity to emotion and quiet observation, capturing spirituality not through spectacle, but through stillness and human connection.



Avani Rai, *People after bathing in the River Ganges, Varanasi, Undated.*



Avani Rai, *Young boys sitting on the ghat by the River Ganges, Varanasi, Undated.*



Avani Rai, *Woman on the ghats,*
Varanasi, Undated.



Raghu Rai, *Dargah Ajmer Sharif,*
Rajasthan, 2008.



Avani Rai and Raghu Rai shared their first photo assignment together in the holy city of Varanasi - a place often described as one where a photographer could spend a lifetime and still find something new to capture. But what image truly captures a moment's essence?

During the assignment, both father and daughter found themselves in a friendly competition to photograph that elusive instant. As both recall, it began to rain torrentially, and they instinctively ran in opposite directions in search of their frames.

Raghu, like an exuberant child, embraced the chaos, photographing freely in the downpour, unbothered by the weather. Avani, more hesitant at first, moved carefully through the storm. Yet the image she made astonished her father, a frame he later described as one that captured “the magic and madness of the moment.”



“Every time we shoot together it's always a competition.”

- Avani Rai

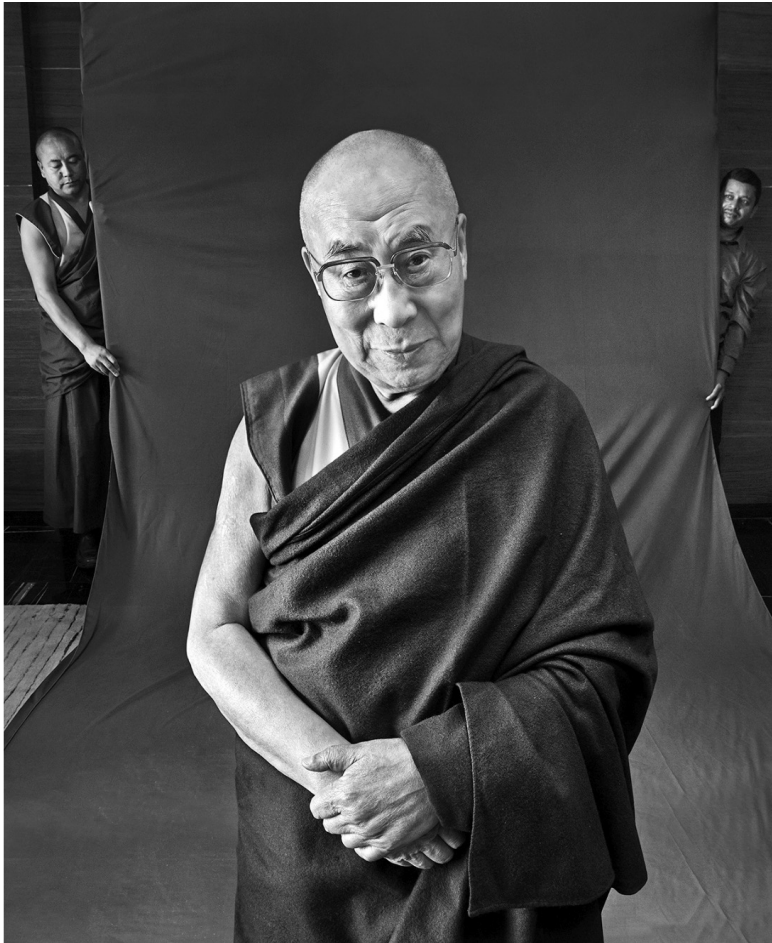
Avani Rai, *Downpour on the ghats*, Varanasi, Undated.

Raghu Rai, *Downpour on the ghats*, Varanasi, Undated.



Avani Rai, *Woman in white clothes*, Punjab, India, Undated.

Raghu Rai, *The Dalai Lama*, Delhi, 2016.



Avani Rai, *Women in Kashmir*, India, Undated.



Raghu Rai, *Mother Teresa,*
Calcutta, India, 1979.



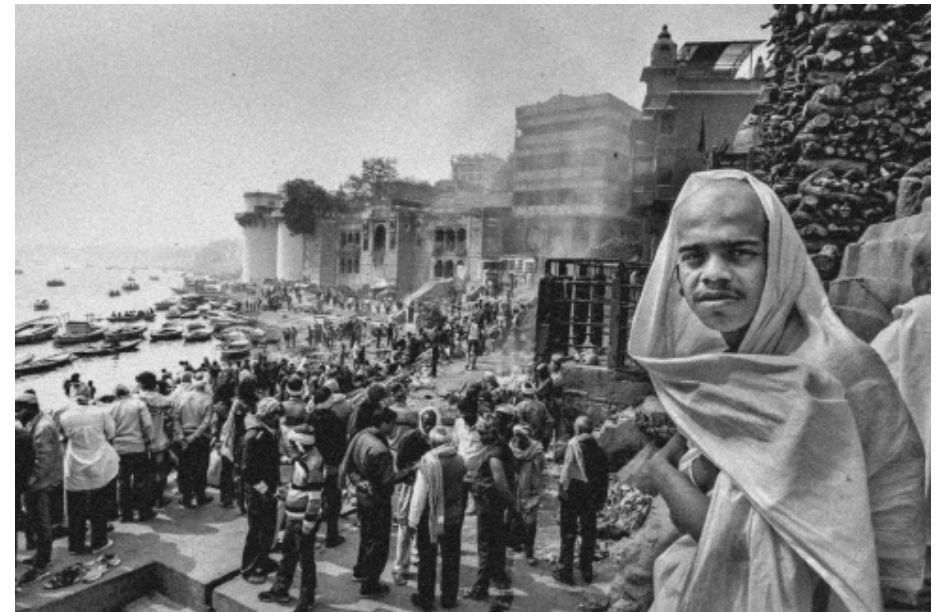
Avani Rai, *Manikarnika Ghat,*
Varanasi, Undated.





Avani Rai, *Man on a boat,*
Varanasi, Undated.

Avani Rai, *Manikarnika Ghat,*
Varanasi, Undated.



At Manikarnika Ghat, one of Varanasi's oldest and holiest cremation grounds, life and death meet on the banks of the Ganges. In Avani's black-and-white photograph, crowds, smoke, and river merge in quiet intensity. Echoing Raghu's expansive gaze, the image captures the spiritual pulse of collective ritual and the city's enduring sacred rhythm.

Avani Rai, *Woman bathing on the ghats,*
Varanasi, Undated.



Avani Rai, *Woman dressing after bathing in the*
Ganges River on the ghat, Varanasi, Undated.





Avani Rai, *Clothes hanging along the ghats, Varanasi*, Undated.

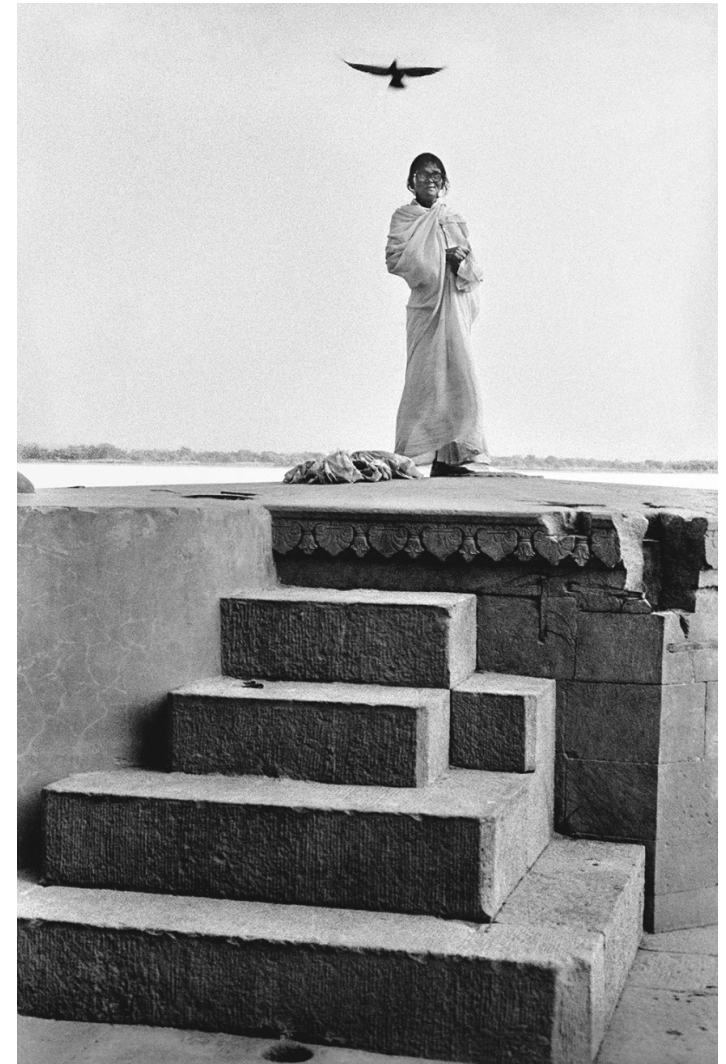
Raghu Rai, *On the bank of Ganga River, Varanasi*, 2007.





Avani Rai, *Man on the ghats,*
Varanasi, Undated.

Raghu Rai, *Woman on*
the ghat, Varanasi, 1974.



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WITNESSING HISTORY



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Avani Rai, *A child in a conflict zone, Kashmir, Undated.*

Raghu and Avani both engage with trauma and human struggle deeply, but their approaches reflect variation shaped by their generation and medium. Raghu, considered as a moral conscience of Indian photojournalism, documented events like the Emergency⁴ and the Bhopal Gas Tragedy⁵ capturing collective grief at a national scale. The photographs confront the viewer with the real, lived experiences of those depicted, reminding us of their humanity beyond the frame.

Avani, while influenced by this legacy, takes a more introspective and meditative path. Her work addresses the spiritual and emotional toll of conflict and loss, such as in her Kashmir⁶ series, where the use of black and white distils the image to its emotional essence. By stripping away colour, she draws attention to gestures, eyes, and

atmospheres that speak of endurance and quiet strength amid turmoil. As Avani reflects, “Colour often distracts from the emotion that is caught in the moment. Black and white, on the other hand, keeps the focus on your subject, on their eyes, and on the emotion.” The monochromatic palette becomes both an aesthetic choice and a conceptual inheritance, a subtle echo of her father’s visual ethics.

While Raghu’s work forms a public, political archive that is rooted in the ethics of witnessing, journalism, and nationality, Avani’s work is more personal and reflective, exploring relationships and inner experiences. This section looks at some of their photojournalistic works, and how they negotiate the politics of witnessing across generations, shifting from public testimony to intimate encounter.



Raghu Rai, *Dust storm created by a VIP Helicopter*,
Rajasthan, 1975.



Raghu's photographs of Bangladeshi refugees, taken during the 1971 Liberation War, bear witness to one of South Asia's most defining humanitarian crises when an estimated 10 million people were displaced and hundreds of thousands lost their lives.

His images capture the exhaustion, resilience, and dignity of displaced lives with profound empathy. Through his lens, the tragedy becomes both collective and deeply personal, an enduring testament to the human cost of conflict and the moral responsibility of seeing.



Raghu Rai, *Buses for refugees were available only into the Indian territories*, Location Unknown, 1971.

Raghu Rai, *Empty stomach frail and barely clothed*, Location Unknown, 1971.



Avani's black-and-white photographs from Kashmir evoke an atmosphere of quiet reflection. Focusing on women and children, she captures fleeting gestures, moments of care, waiting, and endurance, that speak to the emotional weight of living amid conflict.

Her approach is deeply personal and introspective, guided by empathy rather than urgency. In contrast to Raghu's politically charged documentation, Avani's gaze turns inward, tracing how memory, tenderness, and everyday resilience shape the human experience of resistance and belonging.

Raghu Rai, *Women in a conflict zone*, Kashmir, Undated.

Raghu Rai, *Civilians amidst conflict*, Kashmir, Undated.





**Avani Rai, A child in
her home in a conflict
zone, Kashmir,
Undated.**

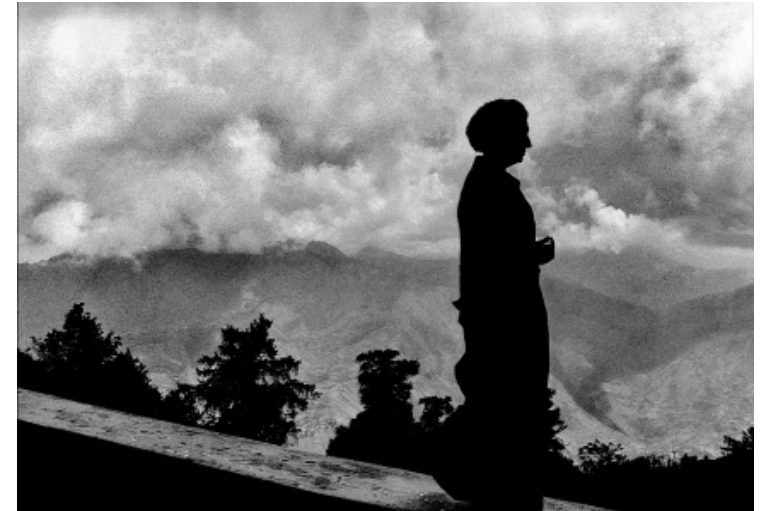
Raghu Rai, *An aborted foetus*
when the tragedy struck,
Bhopal, India, 1984.



Avani Rai, *A girl in downtown Srinagar,*
Kashmir, 2017.



Avani Rai, *A man and child in a conflict zone, Kashmir, Undated.*



Raghu Rai, *Indira Gandhi on the Himalayan mountains, India, 1973.*

Avani Rai, Women in Kashmir,
Undated.



Raghu Rai, Indira Gandhi being escorted
by security guards, 1967.

Avani Rai, *Children make gestures at the bullet-riddled wall of the encounter site of Lateef Tiger in the district of Shopian, Kashmir, 2019.*

In this black-and-white photograph taken in Shopian, Kashmir, children play against a wall marked by bullet holes, the encounter site of militant Lateef Tiger, a member of the Burhan Wani⁷-led insurgent group.

Set within the long and turbulent history of conflict in Kashmir, the image contrasts the remnants of violence with the innocence of play. Rai's lens turns a charged political landscape into a reflective space, where resilience and childhood coexist amid fragility and loss.



Raghu Rai, *Burial of unknown child,*
Bhopal, India, 1984.



Avani Rai, *A Kashmiri woman looks through a plate with a*
bullet hole, damaged by the security forces, Kashmir, 2018.

Avani Rai, *Women in Kashmir*, Undated.



Avani Rai, *A glimpse of the women in Kashmir*, Undated.



**Avani Rai, *Women in a conflict zone* ,
Kashmir, Undated.**



Raghu Rai, *Old Delhi*, 1967.





Avani Rai, *A child and mother inside a house, Kashmir, Undated.*

Raghu Rai, *Swaraj Puri — The officer in charge of Law and Order, Bhopal, India, 2002.*



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INHERITANCE AND INTIMACY



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Avani Rai, *Local Landscapes, Undated.*

Avani and Raghu's shared archive, shaped not only by public events but by familial memory, invites reflection on how photography can hold intimacy, inheritance, and the complex emotional ties that bind one generation to the next. Photographic inheritance is not simply passed down; it is lived, questioned, and reshaped.

Raghu's archive includes intimate photographs of his own family life alongside his broader portrait of India. His extensive portrait work, featuring political leaders, spiritual figures, and everyday citizens, reveals deep empathy and moral curiosity. Approached with the same attentiveness as his public assignments, these images blur the boundary between the personal and the political, suggesting that for Raghu, family and photography are inseparable.

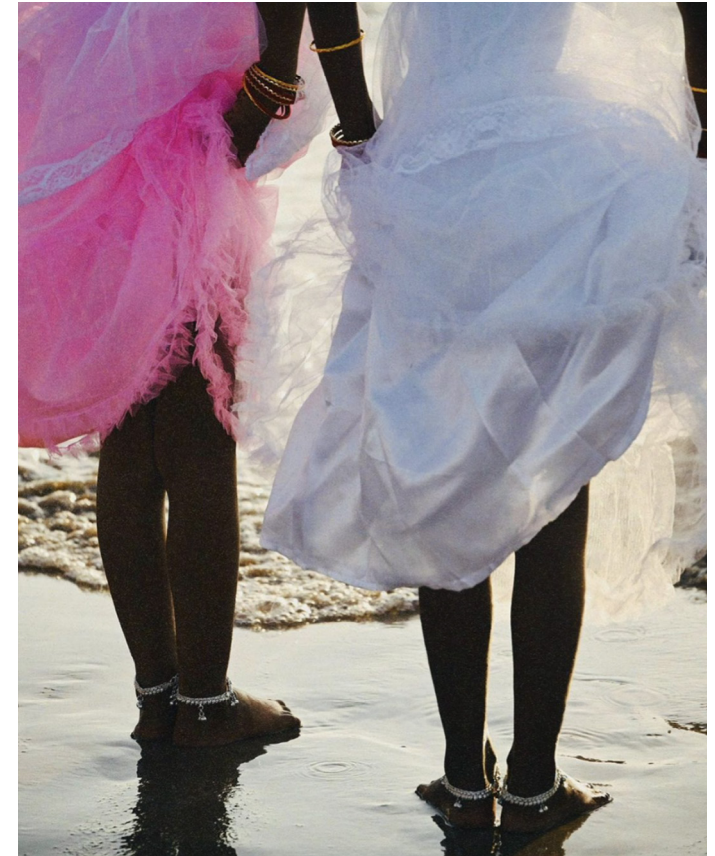
Avani extends this dialogue through her own lens, producing work that moves between photography, film, and mixed media.

Her personal archive spans India's geographies, from Punjab, where her ancestral home lies, to Mumbai, where she lives and works, capturing gestures, landscapes, and rituals that reflect belonging. Beyond her documentary work, Avani's fashion and editorial work for *Vogue*, *GQ*, *Architectural Digest*, and others carries the same introspective gaze, merging personal emotion with professional practice.

In her 2017 documentary about her father, Avani reflects: "When I was a child, he used to shoot me every day. The camera was always there, as if it were a part of him." Growing up within this merging of family and photography, she recognizes that personal memory forms an essential part of her visual archive.

This chapter interweaves both artists' personal and commissioned works, revealing how Avani's gaze transforms inherited memory into a renewed act of seeing.

Avani Rai, *Two Young Girls*, India, Undated.



Avani Rai, *Two young girls on the beach*, Mumbai, Undated.

**Raghu Rai, *Marine Drive*,
Mumbai, 1994.**



Avani Rai, *Marine Drive,*
Mumbai, Undated.



Avani Rai, *Men travelling on the Mumbai*
local train, Mumbai, Undated.





Avani Rai, *Streets of Mumbai, Undated.*

Avani Rai, Gurmeet — *Avani's mother*,
Undated.



Raghu Rai, Meeta — *Raghu's wife at a wedding*
in Punjab, 2000.





Avani Rai, Gurmeet — Avani's mother,
Undated.

**Raghu Rai, Mother in
prayers, and daughter,**
Undated.



Avani Rai, Punjab for Canva, Punjab, Undated.

Avani Rai, Punjab for Canva, Punjab, Undated.



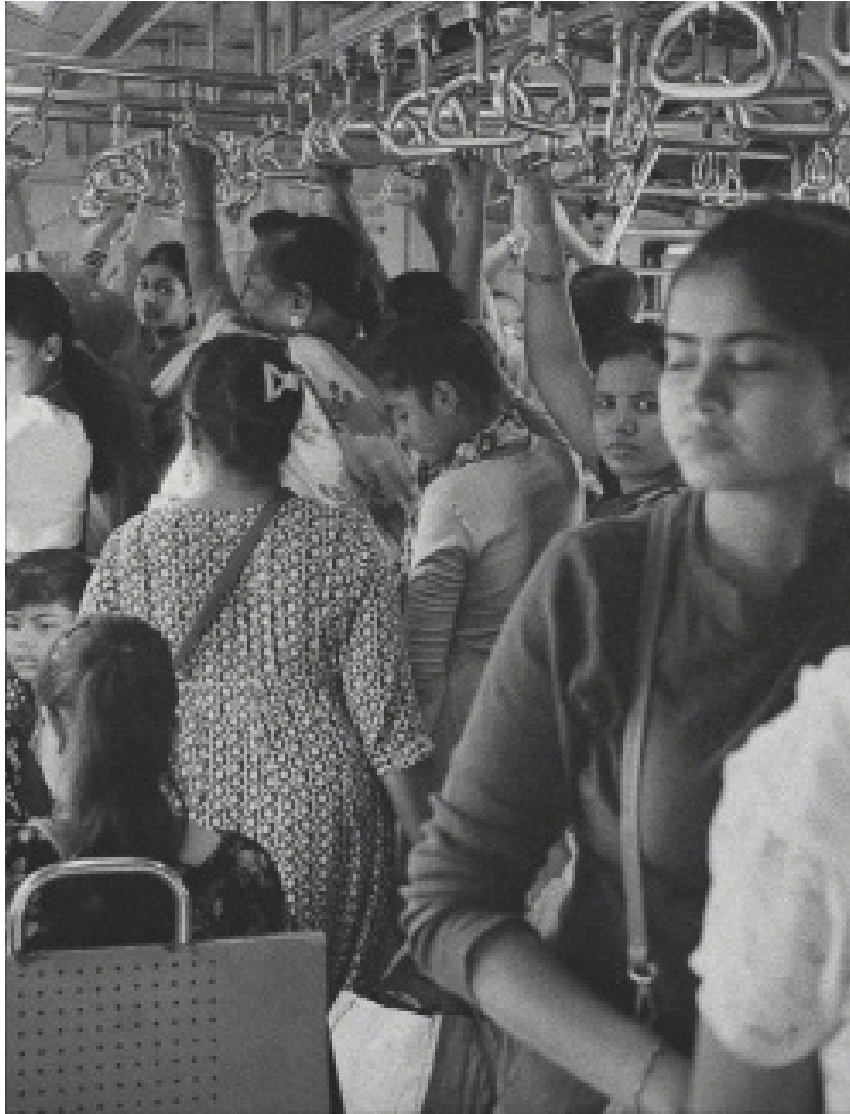
Commissioned by Canva, a digital platform supporting creative and visual storytelling, Avani's photographs from Punjab return to the landscape of her ancestry with quiet introspection. Through portraits, fields, and domestic interiors, she traces the textures of memory and belonging that shape her familial roots. Here, photography becomes both a homecoming and a meditation on identity, continuity, and care.



Avani Rai, Men of Punjab
for Canva, Punjab,
Undated.



Avani Rai, Women
of Punjab for Canva,
Punjab, Undated.



Avani Rai, *People on a bus*, Mumbai, Undated.

Avani Rai, *Shopkeeper in Mumbai*, Undated.



Avani Rai, *Bombay with love*, Mumbai, Undated.



**Raghu Rai, *The Wall - II*,
Old Delhi, 1973.**



**Avani Rai, *Photoshoot for
Grazia*, Mumbai, 2023.**





“Most of the time, I take the photograph that he would want me to take, and then I take the photograph that I want to take. So I take for both of us.”

- Avani Rai

ENDNOTES

1. VARANASI

also known as Kashi, is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world and a major spiritual center in India, famous for its ghats along the Ganges River and vibrant religious rituals.

2. SUFI SHRINES

are sacred sites in Islam dedicated to Sufi saints, known for spiritual gatherings, music, and teachings that emphasise love, devotion, and unity.

3. MAHAKUMBH MELA

is a major Hindu pilgrimage and festival held every 12 years at sacred river sites in India, attracting millions of devotees for ritual bathing and worship.

4. THE EMERGENCY

in India refers to a 21-month period from June 1975 to March 1977, when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency across the country, citing internal disturbances. During this time, civil liberties were suspended, press censorship was imposed, and political opponents were arrested without trial. It remains one of the most controversial periods in India's democratic history.

5. THE BHOPAL GAS TRAGEDY

was a catastrophic industrial disaster that occurred in 1984 when toxic gas leaked from a Union Carbide pesticide plant in Bhopal, India, killing thousands and causing long-term health and environmental damage.

6. KASHMIR

is a politically contested region claimed by both India and Pakistan since 1947, marked by decades of conflict, military presence, and calls for autonomy, making it a highly sensitive and charged space both politically and culturally.

7. BURHAN WALI

was a commander in the Hizbul Mujahideen, an Islamist militant group involved in the Kashmir conflict, advocating for either independence or a merger with Pakistan. Wani gained prominence among sections of Kashmiri youth through his social media presence, which played a significant role in mobilizing support and recruitment for the organization.

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