RAJIV GANDHI NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF LAW, PUNJAB

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

ON

'*NOLITE TE BASTARDES CARBORUNDORUM*'

READING DYSTOPIAS

CONFIGURING FUTURE IN THE PAST

AND

THE PAST IN THE FUTURE

AUGUST 7-8, 2025

AT
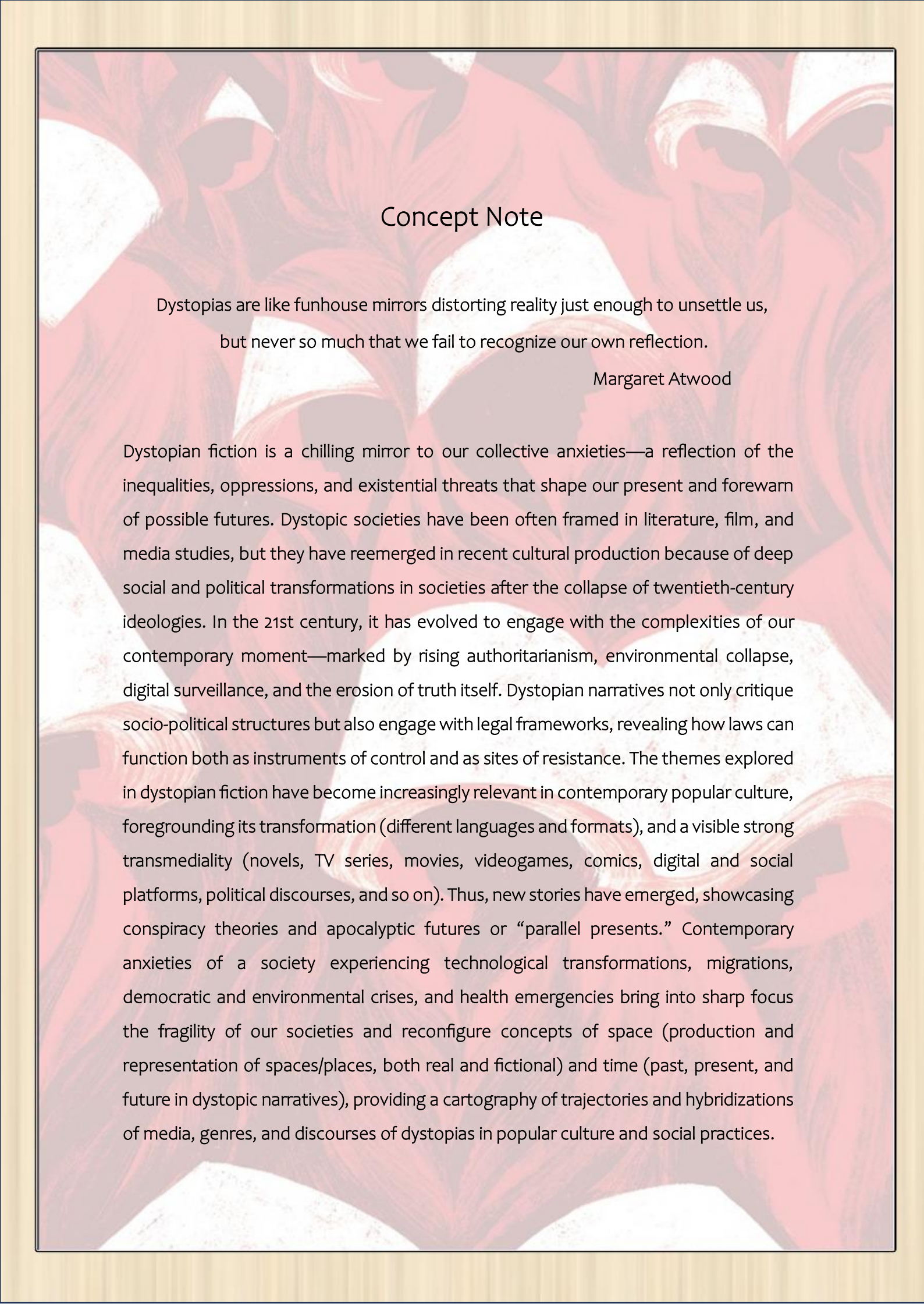
RGNUL CAMPUS, PATIALA, PUNJAB

ORGANIZED BY: DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

About RGNUL

The Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law (RGNUL), Punjab, was established by the State Legislature of Punjab by passing the Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Punjab Act, 2006 (Punjab Act No. 12 of 2006). The University is committed to promoting legal education and research, providing a platform for intellectual exchange, and contributing to national development through its academic initiatives. Accredited with an 'A' grade by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), RGNUL is among the top-ranked law schools in India. The University remains steadfast in its mission to provide an environment conducive to innovative research and quality legal education.

About Conference

The National Conference on Reading Dystopias seeks to interrogate the dystopian imagination across literature, film, and media, tracing how speculative futures and fractured histories converge to critique the present. The conference invites scholars, researchers, and students to engage with feminist dystopias, post-apocalyptic narratives, and speculative aesthetics as critical tools for cultural and political analysis. Department of English, RGNUL, Punjab seeks to frame and explore through the conference the intersection of feminism and dystopia across literature, film, and media, addressing how these works shape and redefine our understanding of power, gender, and justice in the 21st century. Key questions include: How do dystopias engage with contemporary political movements and global crises? In what ways do they subvert traditional gendered portrayals of power and survival? How does the post-truth era alter dystopian storytelling, particularly in feminist speculative fiction? Can feminist critical dystopias offer us blueprints for resistance, or do they merely serve as dire warnings of an impending future? What role do legal systems play in the creation, sustenance, or dismantling of dystopian structures?
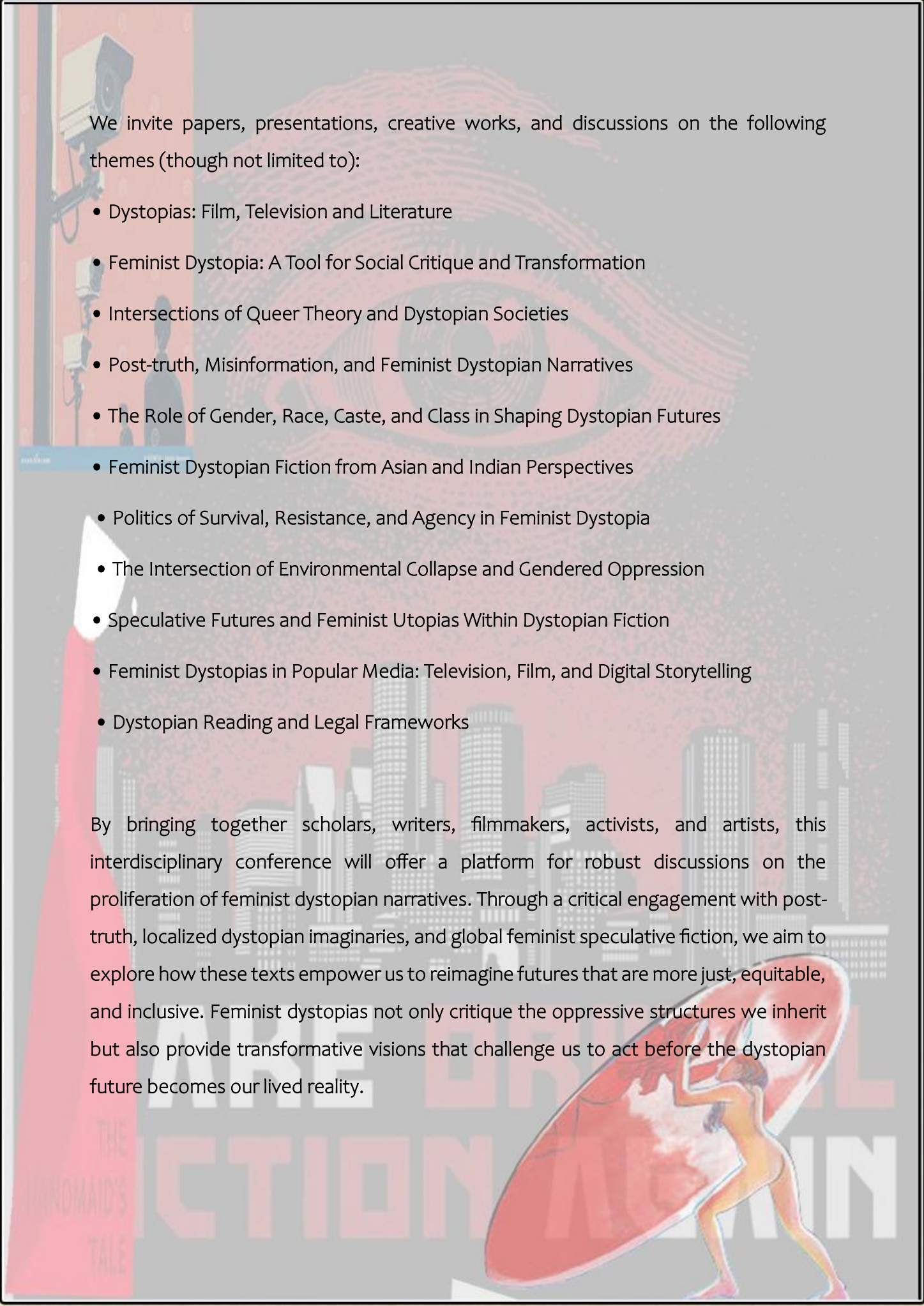
Concept Note

Dystopias are like funhouse mirrors distorting reality just enough to unsettle us,
but never so much that we fail to recognize our own reflection.

Margaret Atwood

Dystopian fiction is a chilling mirror to our collective anxieties—a reflection of the inequalities, oppressions, and existential threats that shape our present and forewarn of possible futures. Dystopic societies have been often framed in literature, film, and media studies, but they have reemerged in recent cultural production because of deep social and political transformations in societies after the collapse of twentieth-century ideologies. In the 21st century, it has evolved to engage with the complexities of our contemporary moment—marked by rising authoritarianism, environmental collapse, digital surveillance, and the erosion of truth itself. Dystopian narratives not only critique socio-political structures but also engage with legal frameworks, revealing how laws can function both as instruments of control and as sites of resistance. The themes explored in dystopian fiction have become increasingly relevant in contemporary popular culture, foregrounding its transformation (different languages and formats), and a visible strong transmediality (novels, TV series, movies, videogames, comics, digital and social platforms, political discourses, and so on). Thus, new stories have emerged, showcasing conspiracy theories and apocalyptic futures or "parallel presents." Contemporary anxieties of a society experiencing technological transformations, migrations, democratic and environmental crises, and health emergencies bring into sharp focus the fragility of our societies and reconfigure concepts of space (production and representation of spaces/places, both real and fictional) and time (past, present, and future in dystopic narratives), providing a cartography of trajectories and hybridizations of media, genres, and discourses of dystopias in popular culture and social practices.

Within this bleak horizon, feminist critical dystopias emerge not only as cautionary tales but as radical interrogations of patriarchal, capitalist, and environmental crises. Unlike traditional dystopias that often end in despair, feminist dystopian narratives engage in resistance, offering alternative imaginaries of survival, solidarity, and transformation. These works disrupt hegemonic structures, unraveling how gendered oppression intersects with racial, environmental, and economic domination while foregrounding acts of agency, resilience, and radical hope. Post-truth politics, where misinformation, ideological manipulation, and the destabilization of facts threaten democratic discourse, feminist dystopias serve as critical interventions. They expose the gendered dimensions of misinformation, the erasure of marginalized voices, and the ways in which disinformation becomes a tool of control. Crucially, feminist dystopias interrogate legal frameworks that regulate bodies, labor, and dissent—whether through restrictive reproductive laws, surveillance policies, or carceral systems. Thus, compelling us to rethink the role of law in shaping dystopian or emancipatory futures, making it a key site of inquiry in contemporary dystopian studies. The rise of digital authoritarianism, censorship, and algorithmic biases further complicate these narratives, demanding an urgent scholarly engagement with how feminist dystopias navigate the politics of truth and resistance in an era where reality itself is contested.

While Euro-American feminist dystopian texts such as Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* have dominated discourse, more recent works like Sophie Mackintosh's *The Water Cure* and Leni Zumas's *Red Clocks* offer compelling critiques of reproductive rights, state control over women's bodies, and gendered violence. These novels, alongside emerging feminist speculative fiction, explore how reproductive autonomy, bodily agency, and political oppression remain central concerns within contemporary dystopian imaginaries. At the same time, the rich and diverse landscape of Asian and Indian feminist dystopian fiction offers critical insights into localized yet globally relevant dystopian anxieties. Texts like Prayaag Akbar's *Leila*, Manjula Padmanabhan's *Escape,* Sowmya Rajendran's *The Lesson* and Samit Basu's *Chosen Spirits* interrogate caste, communalism, environmental degradation, and surveillance capitalism through feminist lens.
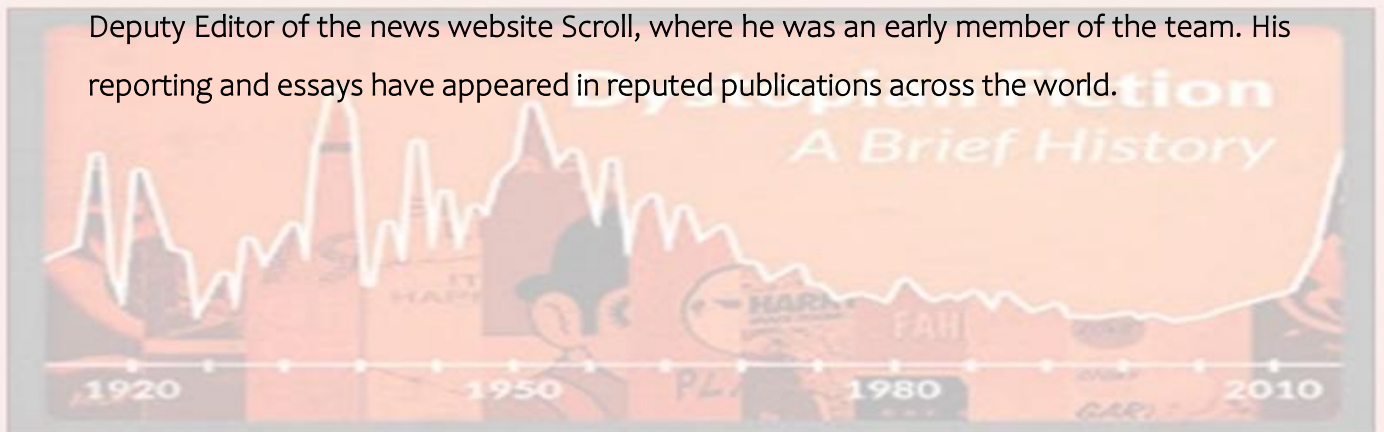
We invite papers, presentations, creative works, and discussions on the following themes (though not limited to):

- Dystopias: Film, Television and Literature

- Feminist Dystopia: A Tool for Social Critique and Transformation

- Intersections of Queer Theory and Dystopian Societies

- Post-truth, Misinformation, and Feminist Dystopian Narratives

- The Role of Gender, Race, Caste, and Class in Shaping Dystopian Futures

- Feminist Dystopian Fiction from Asian and Indian Perspectives

- Politics of Survival, Resistance, and Agency in Feminist Dystopia

- The Intersection of Environmental Collapse and Gendered Oppression

- Speculative Futures and Feminist Utopias Within Dystopian Fiction

- Feminist Dystopias in Popular Media: Television, Film, and Digital Storytelling

- Dystopian Reading and Legal Frameworks

By bringing together scholars, writers, filmmakers, activists, and artists, this interdisciplinary conference will offer a platform for robust discussions on the proliferation of feminist dystopian narratives. Through a critical engagement with post-truth, localized dystopian imaginaries, and global feminist speculative fiction, we aim to explore how these texts empower us to reimagine futures that are more just, equitable, and inclusive. Feminist dystopias not only critique the oppressive structures we inherit but also provide transformative visions that challenge us to act before the dystopian future becomes our lived reality.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Prayaag Akbar is the author of two acclaimed works of fiction, *Mother India* (2024), recently released, and *Leila* (2017). *Leila* won the Crossword Jury Prize and the Tata Lit Live, First Book Award and was shortlisted for the Hindu Prize for Best Fiction and the Shakti Bhatt Award. It was developed into a critically acclaimed series by Netflix, directed by Deepa Mehta. In July 2018, a new edition was released in the United Kingdom, United States and a number of other territories.

Mr. Akbar has worked as a journalist in a number of leading Indian publications. He was a consulting editor with Mint, a leading Indian financial newspaper, and before that was the Deputy Editor of the news website Scroll, where he was an early member of the team. His reporting and essays have appeared in reputed publications across the world.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Abstract:

300–400 words, clearly outlining the research question, methodology, and key arguments. It should include the title of the paper, the author's name, designation, institutional affiliation, and contact details.

Full Paper:

The full paper should adhere to the following specifications:

- Length: Between 3000–5000 words (excluding references)
  - Font: Times New Roman, Font Size: 12 pt, Line Spacing: 1.5, Referencing Style: MLA (9th edition)

- Both the abstract and the full paper must be submitted in Word (.doc/.docx) format. Co-authorship is permitted (maximum of two authors). All submissions should be with the subject line: Conference Submission – [Author's Name] in the registration form. The paper should be original and unpublished. Plagiarism of any kind will lead to disqualification.

- For Queries, Contact: englishdepartmentrgnul@gmail.com.

REGISTRATION DETAILS

- Last Date for Abstract Submission: June 8, 2025

- Notification of Abstract Acceptance: June 20, 2025

- Last Date for Registration: June 30, 2025

- Full Paper Submission: July 15, 2025

Registration Fees:

- Academicians and Professors: ₹2500 + GST

- Research Scholars and Students and Participants: ₹1000 + GST

- RGNUL Students/Scholars/Participants: ₹1000

Please Note:

- In case of co-authored papers, both authors must register separately.

- The registration fee includes a conference kit, lunch, and tea on both days of the conference. No accommodation, travel allowance, or additional meals will be provided by the organizers. (University guest house available on payment basis and first come first served basis)

Registration Form: **Payment Link:**

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