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THIS ISSUE

We are delighted to bring the fourth issue of the SWGI Gender Bi-annual to you. As before, we feature a diverse range of voices from multiple fields of work.

Our pieces reflect the intersectional nature of gendered effects while highlighting how solutions in particular, must keep these connections in mind to be truly successful. Across all four themes of the bi-annual, we find gender interacting in unexpected ways with other socio-economic, demographic and even spatial variables to affect outcomes. From how gender may drive online learning to how it dictates energy usage, our contributors highlight the powerful ways in which the gender order underlies daily exchanges.

In Practitioner Voices, a development practitioner reflects on the various caveats in the ed-tech space and the challenges they bring forth. Academic Work features two pieces, with one reviewing Rubina Saigol's seminal work, *The Pakistan Project: A Feminist Perspective*

on Nation and Identity; and the other looks at marriage ads to chalk out differences between women and men when searching for spouses. In our Gender & Design section, our contributor fleshes out links between energy, gender, and space, emphasizing the need to unpack these linkages for building equitable and just futures. Finally, in Student Features our first set of contributors look at sexism in academia, while the second looks at the Indian suffragist movement through fiction.

We remain thankful to our contributors and to our readers for continuing and furthering the conversation around gender.

DR. HADIA MAJID
EDITOR

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WHAT ONLINE LEARNING HAS TAUGHT US



ANNUM SADIQ

Nearly 24 million children aged 5-16 years are out of school in Pakistan – a worrying statistic for a country experiencing a ‘youth bulge’. While more than 60% of our population is below the age of 30 years, it is mostly unskilled with low educational and productivity levels and is inadequately prepared for gainful employment in high-value added industries. While demand-side issues which result in low enrollment and high

drop-out rates are part of the explanation, Pakistan's severe supply-side issues are a prime driver of its under-performance relative to the rest of the world especially when it comes to learning outcomes. According to the latest ASER 2021 report, of those surveyed, 45 percent students, could not read a sentence in Urdu and their regional languages while 44 percent could not read sentences in English.¹

In the face of teacher absenteeism, infrastructure issues and inadequate school supplies, parents either pull their children out of school and they enter the labor market, or then for those who have the option, look for coaching and private tuitions. Such 'shadow education' i.e., after-school supplementary classes, is a rising trend and has been increasing globally especially in countries with highly competitive exams such as those in East Asia as well as other South Asian countries. Even in Pakistan, an estimated 34 percent of private school students and 17 percent public school students in Punjab are enrolled in after school classes.² This shows the interest parents and stakeholders take in educating the youth, as people are spending a substantial portion of their household income on education. Yet, this raises a number of questions: do all students have equal access to after-school classes? And who are the students that are left behind?

As expected, much of the literature on supplementary classes shows that poorer and rural populations have lower access. Not only are urban teachers generally better qualified, but students from better socio-economic backgrounds have a larger

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Girls are found to have poorer access particularly because of mobility restrictions. When it comes to closing this gap then, technology-based solutions may well be a way forward.
”

variety to choose from. Hence, even when it comes to shadow education, the expectation is that any inequality in educational access across socio-economic classes and other regional and demographic markers will be replicated. Similarly, girls are found to have poorer access particularly because of mobility restrictions. When it comes to closing this gap then, technology-based solutions may well be a way forward.

At its most effective, online education enables one qualified teacher to reach several students at once. Leveraging video as its medium, ed-tech can reach many multiple times the number of students in a day as a traditional classroom teacher teaches in their entire career. Moreover, companies such as Edkasa within the ed-tech space can create and disseminate specially designed videos along with other practice materials to their students particularly from an exam preparatory perspective.

At the same time, students can also take control of their learning. The status quo in a classroom entails one teacher who is assigned to teach a subject, or in the case of Pakistan's education system, a class teacher may teach several subjects, and the students do not have a choice or voice in deciding who this teacher would be. If their teaching style does not match the students' learning style, there is almost nothing that the student can do. However, through ed-tech, students can choose their own teachers and decide when and where they want to learn.





Further, education can be differentiated and customized for each student as they decide the pace of their learning. Similarly, given that online education can be accessed from one's own home, parental concerns about safety, purdah, and general mobility restrictions placed particularly on girls, can effectively be bypassed.

This begs the question: who is able to access this technology and how equitable is it?

Aser Report 2021 states "The presence of technology in households (cell /android phones, computer, digital learning, TV radio and smart phones) has been on the rise. The technology profile of households is changing rapidly. Compared to 2019 when 66 % of HHs (rural) who had cell phones, there are 77 % households in 2021."³ Thus, the urban-rural divide in

tech and subsequently ed-tech access is expected to decline significantly. Gender, however, remains a concern. Only about half of the adult female population in Pakistan own a mobile phone. Girls too see their access to, and use of digital technologies and platforms controlled and monitored. However, given the fact that there are very few government high schools compared to boys schools, ed-tech has been a viable alternative. For example, it has been heartening to note that a large number of users on Edkasa's app are girls who are appearing for their standardized board examinations as private candidates, not enrolled in schools and using edtech platforms as their primary source of education.

Therefore, it can be said that while tech-based solutions do fill the gap in education

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Only about half of the adult female population in Pakistan own a mobile phone. Girls too see their access to, and use of digital technologies and platforms controlled and monitored.
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and learning, there are gaps that remain to be addressed. Not only must gender be factored in, but continued issues of electricity, internet and broadband must be considered while planning and designing initiatives to create access for the 24 million out of school children while enabling continuity of learning as well as improving the quality of education. Both the private and public sector need to design solutions that are based on a human-centered approach and help meet learners where there are at, both in terms of learning levels and a household's technology capability.

Annum Sadiq is the co-founder of Edkasa.

¹ http://asERPakistan.org/index.php?func=news_details&id=437

² <http://lahoreschoolofeconomics.edu.pk/EconomicsJournal/Journals/Volume%2018/Issue%20SP/06%20Khan%20and%20Shaikh.pdf>

³ <http://asERPakistan.org/asER-2021-national-launch>

SAIGOL'S PAKISTAN

A FEMINIST READING OF THE NATIONALIST PROJECT

REVIEWED BY KAVERI QURESHI
AND LAILA RAJANI

In August 2021, feminist scholar, educationalist and activist Rubina Saigol passed away. Though she herself is no longer with us, her analyses remain vital and necessary. This commentary canvasses her immense contribution as reflected in *The Pakistan Project: A Feminist Perspective on Nation and Identity*,¹ a summative monograph bringing together much of her life's work. Originally published in 2013, this book tracks how feminists have intervened in Pakistan's central political debates post-independence. As a feminist analysis of Pakistan, Saigol's book is uniquely historicized and historiographical. This review will explore the historicised, and then the historiographical arguments of the book, before turning to some questions and observations on its wide-ranging implications.

The book begins with the history of Muslim cultural nationalism in the crucible of the encounter with British colonialism. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, architect of the two-nation theory, advocated vocally for English education among Muslims as a way of retaining class privilege, but appealed to the Muslim elite to prevent their daughters from imbibing Western, modern secular education. Saigol critiques Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's speeches on women's education as reflecting "immense nationalist anxiety and schizophrenic splits typical of the agonised colonized man, desperate to hold on to the last bastion of male superiority in the home while entering the modern and scientific world of statecraft, politics and commerce as an unequal partner" (p.52). Deputy Nazeer Ahmed's stance was at first glance different, in insisting that women should learn secular subjects related to the 'public sphere' as well as religion and domestic arts. However, his writings ultimately served the same end, in envisioning women's place as "modern, rational, and enlightened mothers" (p.62). Subsequent chapters turn towards Pakistani social studies and history textbooks from the 1960s to the 1990s and explore how male identity is "visualised in terms of his rights as an individual citizen of the state", female identity is "predicated upon her duties to the nation/state as a mother" (p.109). Going further, Saigol shows how the state textbooks are little different than the materials used in girls' religious seminaries, and thus "there seems to be a marked continuity between

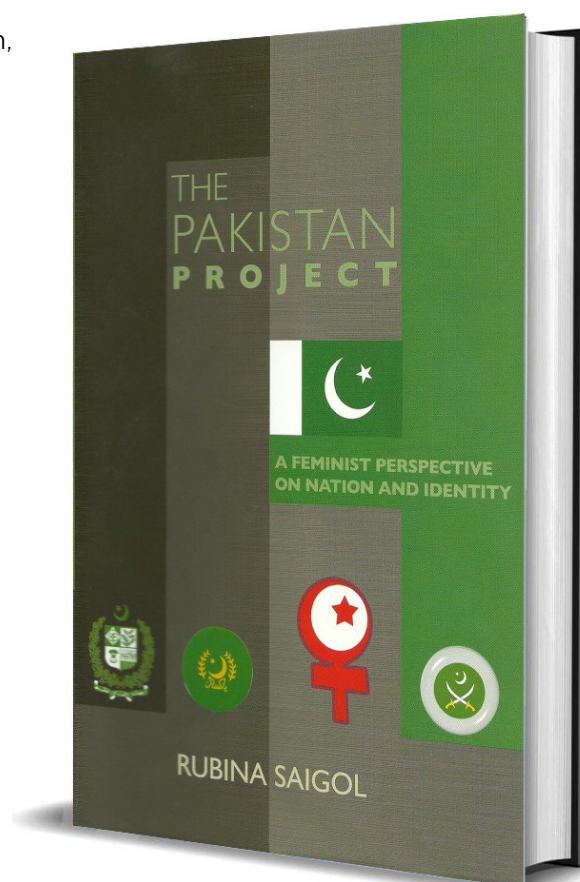
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*Saigol critiques
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 man*
 ”

the imperatives of pre-colonial cultural nationalism, post-colonial state policies, and the aims of the faith-based organisations in terms of containing and controlling female sexuality and curtailing the right of women to make choices in life" (p.168).

Midway through, the book pivots to representations of history, which Saigol explores again in the state-mandated textbooks as well as in nationalist military songs. In the textbooks, Saigol explores how historical accounts are gendered and sexualised. The Muslim male figures typically in a hyper-masculine form as conqueror, liberator and subjugator, whereas the

female historical figures – Hazrat Khadija and Hazrat Fatima – are extolled in feminised terms, as pillars of tolerance and forbearance, sacrifice and self-abnegation. Against these hyper-gendered representations, Hindus, Sikhs, Jews, Englishmen/Christians, and Bengalis – who are cast as Others, as foils against which to elaborate the Pakistani nationalist self – are more ambiguously gendered. They figure both as masculine perpetrators of cruelty and treachery, as well as feminine, when defeated. The war songs deploy similar gendered ideology, glorifying military martyrs such as Major Raja Aziz Bhatti and Rashid Minhas and figuring women as mothers of strong, brave sons ready to fight to the death.

Saigol has a brilliant literary



imagination in reading the gendered discourses and imagery and drawing out their pedagogical implications in perpetuating gender inequality. As readers, the book leaves us with questions regarding the *effects* of this gender ideology, and the extent to which literary analysis of these texts can capture what people take away from them. Studies of reception emphasise the control that readers exercise over the meaning of the texts.² However, where Saigol's book provides glimpses on this, the reception seems largely to reiterate the terms of the discourse – like the *mohajir* women interviewed in Karachi, who have imbibed the gender politics of cultural nationalism in embracing their figuring as mothers of martyrs in the ethnic conflict (p.273-4).

The political implications of the book are drawn out in the final chapters which address Islamisation. Here, Saigol's life work as an activist comes across in terms of her commitment to secular feminist politics, especially via the Women's Action Forum. Saigol insists that feminism should steer clear of religious arguments because "it was an ideology that was so loaded against their rights that the self-appointed guardians of religion would always win on their own wicket" (p.334). On

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Transgender activists may find Saigol's centring of sexuality and desire within nationalist imaginaries utterly fascinating, as with her luminous analyses of the homoeroticism in Akbar Allahabadi and (...)
”

this point, Khan and Kirmani³ critique Saigol, amongst others, for promoting a binary framework in which secular feminism in Pakistan is siloed apart from Islamic feminism, ultimately leading to impasse in the women's movement in the country. By contrast, they point to recent gender justice movements emerging independently at grass-roots level, including the Lady Health Workers' movement and transgender activism, and

draw out their effectiveness despite their lack of linkages to either camp of established feminism. Whilst this is true, we would suggest that Saigol's analyses contain valuable food for thought for those at the vanguard of these newer forms of activism. Those concerned with the Lady Health Workers' movement may take interest in Saigol's repeated conviction that the women's movement must work hand-in-hand with the "labour movement... to win back the state" (p.132). Similarly, transgender activists may find Saigol's centring of sexuality and desire within nationalist imaginaries utterly fascinating, as with her luminous analyses of the homoeroticism in Akbar Allahabadi and Allama Iqbal's poetry (p.76-100) and in textbook representations of Hindu and Muslim places of worship (see p.183-4). In sum, Saigol's historical approach is richly generous.

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¹ Saigol, R. (2013). *The Pakistan project: a feminist perspective on nation and identity*. New Delhi: Women Unlimited.

² Qureshi, K. (2018). Marriage, the Islamic advice literature and its women readers. *Contemporary Levant*, 3(1), 32-43.

³ Khan, A. and Kirmani, N. (2018). Moving beyond the binary: gender-based activism in Pakistan. *Feminist Dissent*, (3), 151-191.

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SPOUSAL SEARCH

Evidence from Historic Marriage Ads

FATIMA AQEEL

Marriage: the choice of who you will wake up to, scream at, share life's big and small moments with, is a big decision. How do we search for such a person, and what do we value? In my research I explore these questions using a unique method of finding marriage partners: through marriage advertisements.



SON 28, fair, handsome 6' B.Com., garments factory owner, own house in North Nazimabad, respectable Sunni family seeks under 23, beautiful, tall, white complexioned American or European national girl from businessman's family write details Box 39751 C/o Dawn. (N-50006)

Proposals invited for graceful and good looking girl Lecturer 30 years unmarried Punjabi family. Boy should be qualified and well set. Please write Box 14772 c/o Dawn, Karachi.

“

Women systematically ask for fewer characteristics in their desired partners than men do.

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Growing up in urban Pakistan, my own fascination with marriage ads began with a curiosity about culture. The ads provide a unique insight into what kinds of partner traits are valued, and by omission not valued, in the current social milieu. This is what initially led me to collect marriage ads from the year 1980 to 2000 (at 5-year intervals) from a newspaper in Pakistan. The newspaper I chose was the English language newspaper with the largest readership for that timeframe, Dawn. While its readers are not representative of the average Pakistani reader, they provide an interesting case study. My findings point to constraints women face in marriage search, and I would expect these to be even greater for the general population.

In developing countries, especially in South Asia, advertisements play a serious role in searching for partners: they are used by parents to search for spouses for their children. A typical marriage ad consists of information on who the match is being sought, son or daughter for, age, possibly education, occupation, physical appearance, religion, and ethnicity. The second part of the ad describes the qualities of the ideal match along the same characteristics.

After collecting the ads and organizing them into a way economists and other analysts could use, I dove into understanding what traits are valued by men and women (or,

at least by their parents), how this changed over time, and how men and women search for partners.

What I found immediately was that men and women have very distinct ways of searching for partners. Women systematically ask for fewer characteristics in their desired partners than men do. Instead, most of their ad is spent describing their own traits and merits. The ads cost a standard rate for a minimum number of words, beyond which there is an extra cost per word. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to spend this cost on describing what they want in a partner.

Why might this be the case? Looking at how ads change depending on the age of the ad-poster sheds some light on this question. The number of distinct traits desired by women in their potential partners peaks at about age 24, and then declines steadily. For men, the peak is a decade later, around 34. To put this in context, the average age of marriage for women in Pakistan was between 18-23 in 1991.¹ The ads suggest that as women approach the end of this range, they make fewer demands in potential spouses. This strategy seemingly corresponds to one of casting as wide a net as possible. Meanwhile, for men, the strategy is to elicit people who match their desired qualities.

Why would age be such an important feature of marriage search for women? It turns out that both the demands



Image by Sadaf Javed

made in marriage ads, and the own characteristics mentioned, are strongly consistent with traditional gender norms. Men are twice as likely as women to ask for physical traits in partners, such as beauty, height, complexion, and weight. Physical traits have traditionally been linked to health and the ability to bear children.² This might be why women are more likely to emphasize their own physical features when placing ads too. Meanwhile, in their own marriage partners women seek men in stable, high paying occupations, and mirroring this, male ad-posters emphasize their occupation and education.

Together the ads data paint an interesting picture. Against the backdrop of strong gender norms (which are prevalent in many societies today, as seen in the pandemic), women are valued for traits related to childbearing, and men to traits related to the ability to provide. Since women's fecundity is bound by time, there is pressure to be married by a certain age. Perhaps for this reason in the marriage ads they are far less picky in their search for partners relative to men, and their demands decline with age. Interestingly, I also find this to be true of women who mention their education in the ads and are more educated.

The downside of a strategy of being less selective is having to decide among suitors who may not be personally desirable. This is especially true given that partner search is costly in time and effort, and that individuals can only go through a certain number of proposals before deciding. Being more specific about traits narrows the market, signals what is important, and may lead to higher quality matches because the starting pool was more tailored to what someone wants. In fact, using Labor Force Survey data for the same time and geographic locations as the ads, I find that the actual characteristics of spouses (in terms of spousal age gaps and educational gaps) are closer to those desired by men in the ads than those desired by women. All in all, for such a substantial decision in one's life, it may be worth it to be more specific!

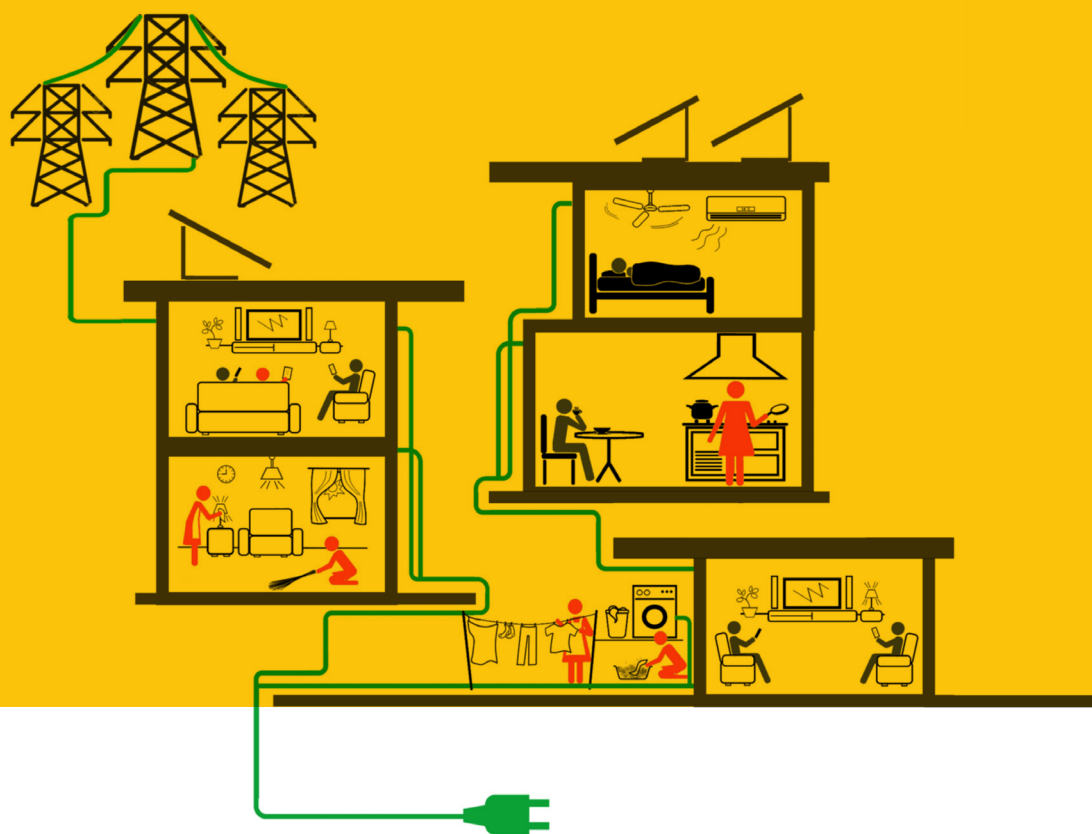
Fatima Aqeel is an Assistant Professor at the Colgate University Department of Economics, with research interests at the intersection of labor, gender, and development Economics.

¹ DHS (1991). Pakistan demographic and health survey 1990-1991. Islamabad, Pakistan and Maryland, USA. National Institute of Population Studies (NIPS) and ICF.

² Fisman, R., S. S. Iyengar, E. Kamenica, and I. Simonson (2006). Gender differences in mate selection: Evidence from a speed dating experiment. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 121(2), 673-697; Hamermesh, D.S (2011). In *Beauty Pays*, Princeton University Press.

LINKING GENDER, ENERGY AND SPACE - USE

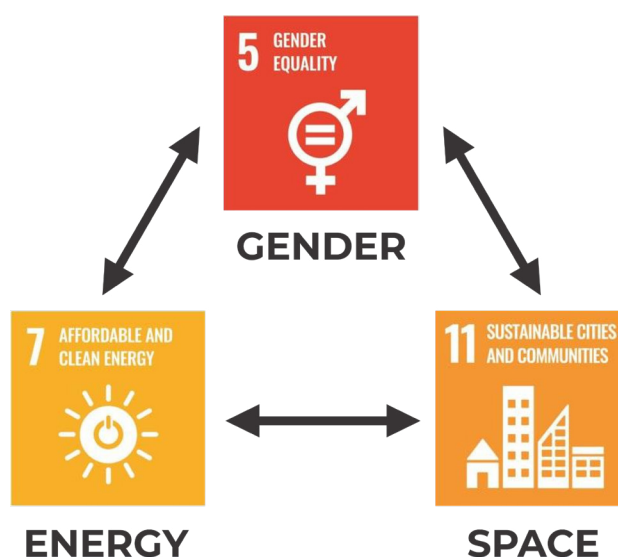
The Key to a Just and Sustainable City



RIHAB KHALID

Buildings and spaces are not gender neutral. Their design impacts men and women in different ways - a factor that has been accentuated during the Covid-19 pandemic,¹ and that has implications for the sustainable development of buildings and cities that ensures universal and equitable access.

Although gender equality is acknowledged as a key theme across the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), limited focus is given to how gender intersects with other development goals like universal energy access (SDG7) and sustainable growth of cities (SDG11). This three-way intersection and its significance for just and sustainable future transitions needs to be understood by examining each of the links between gender, energy, and space-use, as explained below.



Linking SDG5, SDG7 and SDG11

There is a deep connection between energy and space-use. Buildings account for about 40% of global energy consumption and one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions, and over half of overall electricity demand.² This demand is predicted to continue increasing over the coming decades. To meet COP26³ targets, estimates show that building energy intensity will have to improve by 30% by 2030.⁴ For investigating energy in the built environment, focusing on building construction and design is important, but equal focus should be given to how buildings are used. This is because ultimately, 'buildings don't use energy, people do'.⁵ Studies show that even when buildings are designed to be efficient with low-energy technologies, they can end up using about **3 times** more energy than their designed estimates.⁶ This is because of variations in occupant lifestyle, behaviour, and socio-cultural practices, which

have shown to result in **4-6 times**⁷ variation in energy demands in similar type of buildings. Hence, it's important to understand energy as a resource that is used not *in and of itself*, but for carrying out various activities and practices by its end-users, in line with their social, cultural, and spatial contexts.

The link between energy and space-use is mediated by gender. Specifically, if occupant lifestyles and behaviours play an important role in building energy demand, gender becomes a key factor of difference. Research shows that men and women access, consume, are affected by, and/or benefit from energy practices, policies and services in different ways, due to gendered energy access⁸ and gendered technologies.⁹ The gendered distribution of energy services can be understood in terms of the division of labour between men and women: Even today in most societies, men are considered as head of the households and breadwinners of the family. On the other hand, women are responsible for at least **2.5 times** more unpaid care and domestic work as men,¹⁰ like cooking, cleaning, laundering, household management, and caregiving. Research¹¹ shows that there is often a clear distinction between women's work-related use of energy

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Enclosed central courtyard of traditional haveli - providing private open space conducive to female practices

such as in household chores or in home-based income-generating activities (such as tailoring, weaving, etc), while men's use of domestic electricity is associated with comfort, convenience, and entertainment (such as lighting, air-conditioning, television, etc). Further, women often make more responsible and eco-friendly choices,¹² such as using less air-conditioning and recycling more. A review of Pakistan's energy policies and interviews with energy experts¹⁰ show three key factors that result in women's differential energy access. This includes a lack of gender-disaggregated data on women's distinct energy needs; women's under-representation in the energy and planning sector- in Pakistan, women make up less than 5% of the workforce in power utilities¹³ and less than 1/3rd of registered architects and planners;¹⁴ and gender-neutral energy policies that, because of their gender-blindness, continue to reproduce gender-biased energy outcomes that marginalise women's energy needs, for example load-shedding schedules that have greater impact on women's daily routines.

When it comes to planning and development for sustainable cities and space-use, gender again plays a significant role. Notwithstanding that women will form the majority of urban citizens in the coming decades, with ever greater numbers of female-headed-households,¹⁵ women still face numerous



Outdoor open space in contemporary modernist housing that lacks privacy for women's use

barriers and constraints in their access to space within cities. Part of this has to do with the gendered division of labour in the separation of private/public spheres. At the same time, 'gender-neutral' planning and policies end up further limiting women's spatial and energy access.

Urban women experience the built environment differently from men, often with profound disadvantages in terms of less mobility, more vulnerability, and more responsibilities. Subsequent differences in gender roles and relations end up marginalizing women economically, physiologically, socially, sexually, and politically. Whilst we can all agree that this differential access to women's energy and space exists at the cityscape, which is 'overwhelmingly designed by men, and for men',¹⁶ even the design of domestic spaces can sometimes prove inconducive to women's privacy and practices, with implications for their energy demand. For example, research on urban middleclass housing in Pakistan¹⁷ shows that contemporary housing follows a Westernised modernist design with ever-greater reliance on mechanical ventilation and cooling. Building regulations often mandate building setbacks, pre-determining the configuration of outdoor spaces, and restrictions on the heights of boundary walls and roof parapets. Unlike the traditional central courtyard *havelis* of the

past, contemporary domestic outdoor spaces provide no privacy or segregation for use by women who are then forced to shift their practices indoors, with greater reliance on indoor comfort. Moreover, even indoor spaces that are often open planned with large glass windows, can hinder women's privacy and spatial access. This then impacts women's domestic energy consumption, either directly e.g., through greater use of artificial lighting and cooling when curtains are kept drawn, or indirectly through limiting their space-use outdoors e.g., for household chores and relaxing.

Many such examples show that the house still represents one of the most gendered spaces. Advancements in energy technologies have yet to transform gender roles and relations in most societies. In terms of housing policies, gender-neutrality prevails, meaning we are still far from achieving what Dolores Hayden

imagined as 'the non-sexist city'.¹⁸ Suffice to say that the links between energy, gender and space use remain significant even today and it is only by critically investigating and targeting intersections between the three, can we truly achieve just and sustainable cities.

Disclaimer: An earlier version of this article was published in [The Conversation UK](#).

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¹Zamarro, G., Perez-Arce, F., & Prados, M. J. (2020). Gender Differences in the Impact of COVID-19. KTLA. Accessed on July, 16, 2021.

²IEA (2021), World Energy Outlook 2021, IEA, Paris. 1

³The UN's annual Climate Change Conference 2021, held in Glasgow, Scotland in which 200 nations came together to discuss progress and set commitments for the Paris Agreement. <https://ukcop26.org/cop26-goals/>

⁴UNEP. (2021). Emissions Gap Report 2021: The Heat Is On – A World of Climate Promises Not Yet Delivered. UNEP Copenhagen Climate Centre (UNEP-CCC).

⁵Janda, K. B. (2011). Buildings don't use energy: People do. *Architectural Science Review*, 54(1), 15–22.

⁶Palmer, J., Godoy-Shimizu, D., Tillson, A., & Mawditt, I. (2016). Building Performance Evaluation Programme: Findings from domestic projects- Making reality match design. Innovate UK. s

⁷Gram-Hanssen, K. (2014). New needs for better understanding of household's energy consumption – behaviour, lifestyle or practices? *Architectural Engineering and Design Management*, 10(1–2), 91–107.

⁸ENERGIA. (2019). Gender in the transition to sustainable energy for all: From evidence to inclusive policies. ENERGIA International Network on Gender and Sustainable Energy.

⁹EIGE. (2020). Gender Equality Index 2020—Digitalisation and the future of work (p. 182). European Institute for Gender Equality.

¹⁰UNDP, Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2021, United Nations Development Programme, New York, 2018.

¹¹Khalid, R., & Foulds, C. (2021). Gendering practices and policies in the South: Lessons for improved equity and sustainability in Pakistan's domestic energy sector. *ECEE 2021 Summer Study on energy efficiency: a new reality?*

¹²Hunter, L. M., Hatch, A., & Johnson, A. (2004). Cross-National Gender Variation in Environmental Behaviors. *Social Science Quarterly*, 85(3), 677–694.

¹³ESMAP. (2020). Pathways to Power: South Asia Region Baseline Assessment for Women Engineers in the Power Sector. World Bank Group.

¹⁴Retrieved from PCATP- Pakistan Council for Architects and Town Planners. <https://www.pcatp.org.pk/>

¹⁵UN-Habitat. (2013). Gender and Prosperity of Cities: State of Women in Cities 2012/2013 (ISBN: 978-92-1-132553-9; State of Women Reports). UN-Habitat.

¹⁶Chant, S., & McIlwaine, C. (2015). Cities, slums and gender in the Global South: Towards a feminised urban future. Routledge. pp. 03

¹⁷Khalid, R., & Razem, M. (2022). The nexus of gendered practices, energy, and space use: A comparative study of middleclass housing in Pakistan and Jordan. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 83, 102340.

¹⁸Hayden, D. (1980). What Would a Non-Sexist City Be Like? Speculations on Housing, Urban Design, and Human Work. *Signs*, 5(3), S170–S187.

LOOKING INWARDS

SEXISM IN ACADEMIA

BY AHSAN MASHHOOD, FARYAL ASHFAQ, HAJRAH YOUSAF,
SHAHBAZ ASIF, AND ZOYA HASHIM



Image: tehtalk.com

Here's something that will change the way you view academia: start noticing how discussion panels with a good enough gender-mix among speakers are likely to introduce female PhDs as Ms. and male PhDs as Dr.¹ Notice also how female speakers are given significantly lesser chances to talk and are usually invited

to speak on topics that exclusively have to do with gender, which may feel like token representation.² Similar forms of sexism may pervade other academic settings such as classrooms, discussion circles, and seminars as well, which is why we decide to investigate this phenomenon in our own academic institution, the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS).

We found that our key conclusions confirmed what existing literature³ had to say, and phenomena like token representation (enabled by the administration) and mistitling of women professors (by students and faculty alike) were prevalent at LUMS too. This was especially true for fields such as Computer Science and Electrical Engineering. This is interesting as the university is otherwise considered as one of the top-ranking institutions and claims to foster thoughtful and open-minded individuals that uphold equity. Even courses with disproportionately higher number of female students, such as Sociology and Psychology courses, still had high representation of men in higher faculty and administrative positions. “Female professors are often still given additional work, but without any comparable promotions or opportunities” discussed an interviewee. Our research also found female academics were often given “confusing” tasks such as beautifying the campuses or being consulted for food options on campus, something their male counterparts were almost never required to do.

Interestingly, given how our research took place during the pandemic,⁴ we also explored the additional burden female academics had to experience during the emergence of COVID-19. Many of our female respondents reported doing up to three forms of labor i.e., faculty at a private university,

consultant for private or public organization, and being a full-time homemaker, and disproportionately higher ‘care burdens’ than their male counterparts. In particular, our respondents shared that students were more likely to reach out to female professors for counselling, emotional support and assistance with gendered struggles. Our male respondents acknowledged this disparity yet stated they had “failed to substantially do something about it”.⁵ Conversely, some female academics

unpaid labor (such as housework and caregiving) and empathize with the double-burden of female students and academics.

Academia as a profession is often considered the line of work of intellectuals, who have the ability to engage with the nuances of theory and policy. Unfortunately, it is still not immune to the limitations that it sets out to deconstruct. We hope our research can inform university level policy making and engage in discourse concerning women in academia.

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reported how having the whole family stuck at home during COVID-19 gave male members of the household a chance to recognize the invisibilization of

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¹ Litosseliti, L. (2014). *Gender and language theory and practice*. Routledge.

² Braniff, M., & Whiting, S. A. (2016). ‘There’s Just No Point Having a Token Woman’: Gender and Representation in the Democratic Unionist Party in Post-Agreement Northern Ireland. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 69(1), 93-114.

³ Savigny, H. (2014). Women, know your limits: Cultural sexism in academia. *Gender and education*, 26(7), 794-809

⁴ Our research initially started as being both fieldwork and online ethnography but shifted to exclusively being online as the third and fourth wave hit, mid-April.

⁵ Professor of Political Science at LUMS.



ALL GREEN

This is a work of fiction where the writer assumes the voice of Ashar, a 19-year-old boy and records it as a diary entry. It is set amidst the Indian suffragist movement and captures how a surprising encounter with local protesters impacts Ashar and his friends.

MAHNOOR ASIM

8th October 1933

Why am I writing in green? Well, several reasons. 1) It's the only pen I could find, 2) It's the League's color, and 3) I AM VERY, VERY ANGRY and have no time to find another. Why the rage? Well...

I was in my room like I always am in the summer. I watched the leaves drop and dance from the tree outside my window. Strange how each leaf knows when to let go at the right time.

There's a faint knock on the window. It's Rafay. We had planned to sneak into our university, Aligarh, with some friends. On the walk there, we saw a stream of women chanting slogans. The group split into two: Four on the side of "Inke ye karne se kya hoga?" (What will happen if they do this?); Rafay said, "the point is collective unity until they are listened to."

The rally continued harmoniously until the police arrived and drove the women away. Fire seems incredible

when a fire performer dances with a stick-on fire, twirling it in perfectly synced motions. I saw a woman break into fits of coughing from the smoke of the lit wooden sticks the armed men used. This was not a performance. Inside the wide-open spaces on the road, I found a mixture of freedom and chaos. Rain swept across a desolate landscape amidst the struggle between justice and pain. A storm was brewing, so we ran the other way.

"I know what I will stage my play on," I spoke.

"Don't tell me it's this women's activism and all that," said Rafay.

"The 'all that' is what we should be fighting for. Downplaying it into the et cetera category is exactly what's wrong. Everyone will be at the play; it'll get noticed."

"It's too political. Your play will be judged on politics."

"So, I should just watch and nod? Maybe this is my chance to help. They don't need my help, granted, but one extra voice may just make it sound loud enough to be heard."

"Why do I keep raising all these 'rights' while ranting," they ask me. Oh, I don't know, probably because your enslaved state is stuck in the dark ages. Playing catch-up with humanity can be challenging, especially when ill-informed "religious" leaders throw you a couple of centuries back. Even Gandhi bluntly belittles women proposing that the need for women's activism is their "capacity for infinite love and sacrifice." Is that all women are to them, vessels for men? Some of my friends still believe such people can run this country. Yes, run and ruin. Chaos was everywhere, with everyone's arms in the air, trying to escape the trickling water while the armed men brought out their umbrellas.

I have been thinking about this for days. Writing and refining the play. Trying desperately to add magic to these tragedies galore. Still unsure if I'll stage it, though. For a Rajput, bravery seems not to be my strong suit. Perhaps, for now, it will just burn within me like folklore.

Mahnoor Asim is an Economics major with a minor in Psychology at LUMS.

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