

Lilly Reich SCHOLARSHIP FOR EQUALITY IN ARCHITECTURE

Title: Transnational Narratives: A documentary celebrating South Asian women in architecture.

Research Group:

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a) Objectives of the activity or study

- To research and document the significant contributions of recognized women architects of South Asian origin living in Pakistan and the United Kingdom, and to widely disseminate their achievements.
- To critically examine the barriers, both subtle and overt, faced by women in the architectural profession, especially in patriarchal societies such as those in South Asia, using sociological methods of analysis.
- Promote a more inclusive and equitable architecture profession by promoting gender equity initiatives.
- Inspire and empower the next generation of women architects by sharing the stories and strategies of pioneers who have successfully navigated and challenged the nature of the profession.

b) Preliminary summary of the project

Women have played a crucial role in shaping societies, both as professionals and as members of their communities. However, their contributions are often overlooked or intentionally minimized. This erasure is especially evident in the field of architecture, where they have historically faced systemic challenges. For much of its history, architecture has been a male-dominated profession, with male architects frequently taking the spotlight and being celebrated as the "stars" of the field. As Adam and Tancred (2000) point out, the profession has been shaped by a patriarchal ethos that has marginalized women's achievements.

Since the 1990s, this narrative has been increasingly challenged thanks to scholars such as the Spanish Beatriz Colomina (1992, 1999). Currently, there is a concerted effort to recognize and celebrate the contributions of women architects, highlighting their critical role in shaping the built environment. Researchers such as Burns and Brown (2020) have stressed the importance of giving due credit to women in architecture. Despite these advances, subtle and pervasive barriers continue to hinder the progress of women architects, manifesting themselves in a lack of recognition and limited opportunities to ascend to leadership positions within the profession. These challenges are most pronounced in patriarchal societies such as those in South Asia, where rigid gender stereotypes (Saeed and Zainab, 2017) and societal expectations often dictate women's career paths. In these contexts, professional achievements are often minimized or overshadowed by family and social responsibilities. However, despite these obstacles, women architects from India and Pakistan have made significant contributions to the field, balancing the demands of family life and social pressures.

When examining the transnational educational and professional experiences of women architects of Pakistani and Indian origin in different cultural contexts, such as Pakistan and England, it becomes apparent that although the challenges may differ in form, they often have similar roots. In England, where the profession is also dominated by men, female architects face challenges related to work-life balance, gender biases and the glass ceiling that limits their advancement to leadership positions. However, the social framework in England offers a different set of opportunities and obstacles, where

issues such as maternity leave, gender equity policies and professional networks for women are more established, although they are still insufficient to fully support career progression. On the other hand, women architects in Pakistan navigate a more overtly patriarchal society, where cultural expectations around gender roles are more rigid and the professional environment is less responsive to women's needs. Despite these barriers, they have demonstrated remarkable resilience and innovation, leveraging their positions to influence social change and community development through their work.

This investigative documentary will focus on the compilation of original recorded interviews with six women architects of South Asian heritage, some of which were presented at the symposium 'Voices of Women in Architecture', held in London (11 January 2024) and Lahore (18-19 January 2024), co-organised by Troiani and Iqbal. Pakistani architects include renowned retired academic and executive director of the non-profit THAAP, Sajida Vandal; the first woman professor emeritus in Pakistan and the first woman with a doctorate in architecture in the country, Professor Neelum Naz; and the architect, academic and social worker involved in Women in Architecture Pakistan, Fauzia Qureshi. Sarah Khan, a partner at Roger Mears Architects in London, is the first Pakistani woman to have passed the ARB exemption exam, and Dr. Sumita Singha OBE is an Indian-born architect, author and director of Ecologic Architects in the UK. Based in Bangalore, Chitra Vishwanath is a principal architect and founder of Biome Environmental.

The documentary will explore the complexities associated not only with their individual search for socially and environmentally responsible architecture, but also with their interculturality and the patriarchal societies of the subcontinent in which they live. It will be based on the writings of research applicants and interviewees (Naz 2023; Singha 2016, 2023, 2024), advocating for social and gender parity for women architects worldwide.

c) Methodology

This project employs a qualitative and critical visual research methodology, using filmmaking (Troiani 2021, 2019), which has already been applied by Troiani in previous works (2015, 2013, 2010, 2004). The focus is on exploring and documenting the experiences, contributions and challenges of women architects of South Asian origin in two distinct but interconnected cultural contexts: Pakistan and England. The central objective is to recognize the influence of the project initiated by Colomina, who will be mentioned in the film for making Lilly Reich visible in the history of architecture, to then capture the nuanced perspectives of these women at the intersection of their professional and private lives. This will be achieved through in-depth interviews, which will be recorded and compiled into a documentary. Troiani (2019) has previously used oral testimony as an important method of research. Troiani (2016) and Iqbal (2023, 2020) have done extensive work on women and transnational architectural education, and their influence on the ability of marginalized architects to challenge gender stereotypes. This documentary will serve not only as a visual archive, but also as a powerful narrative tool to highlight the transnational experiences of women in the architectural profession.

The main method of data collection will be the in-depth semi-structured interview. These interviews will allow participants to share their experiences, challenges, and achievements in their own words, providing rich and detailed information about their career paths. The semi-structured format will offer a flexible framework that will ensure the exploration of key issues, while allowing participants to discuss issues that they consider most relevant.

The study will employ comparative analysis to examine the similarities and differences in the experiences of women architects in Pakistan and England, and how these experiences change when they travel between these countries. This analysis will explore how cultural, social, and professional contexts shape the challenges and opportunities faced by these women. By comparing the narratives of these two countries, the project will uncover transnational patterns and unique contexts that influence gender dynamics in the architectural profession.

The recorded interviews will be compiled and edited into a documentary, which will serve as a visual and narrative record of the project. This documentary will be structured thematically, with segments focusing on key issues such as professional recognition, gender bias, work-life balance, and strategies for overcoming challenges in a male-dominated field. Visual elements, such as images of architectural and contextual works from both countries, will be integrated to provide a comprehensive view of professional environments

(d) *Main sources and reference bibliography*

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Filmography

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- Troiani, I. (2013) *Architect*, director, screenwriter and illegal producer: I. Troiani; Editor: A. Robinson; Costume designer: A. Bois d'Enghien; Main actors: S. Linin and S. Orange; Visual Effects Supervisor and Designer: K. Welz. Produced by Caryatid Films. (Short film) [Public screening at the FWSA (Feminist and Women's Studies Association) conference in Leeds in September 2015; at the Gloria Biograf (film) & Café, Copenhagen Film Festival in March 2015; 8th Biennial International Interdisciplinary Conference on Gender, Labour and Organisation on 5 June 2014 in Keele, United Kingdom; and at the Phoenix Picturehouse, Oxford, in September 2013.]
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