



**ROUNDTABLE:  
FEMINIST NETWORKS AND  
ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP**

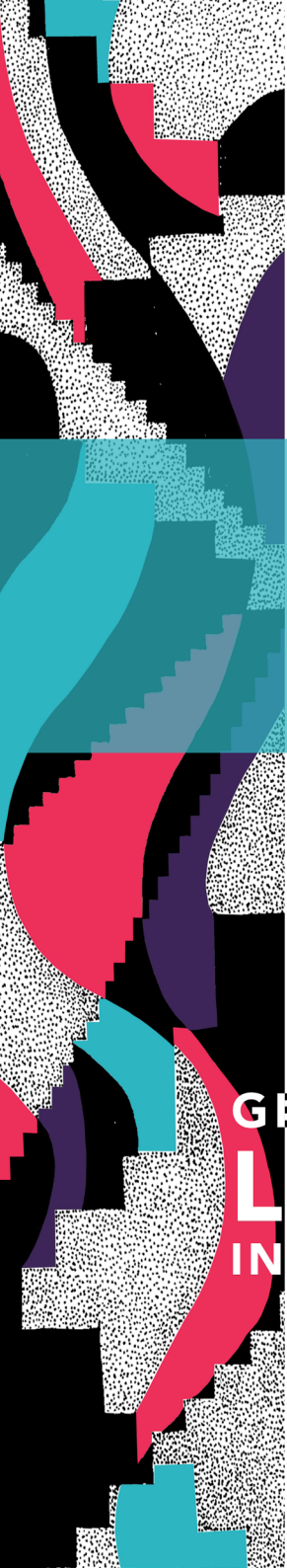
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**INSTANT PROCEEDINGS**

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**GENDER AND ACADEMIC  
LEADERSHIP  
IN ARCHITECTURE IN INDIA**

Convened By  
Madhavi Desai, Anuradha Chatterjee, Kush Patel



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# **Virtual Roundtable: Feminist Networks and Academic Leadership**

**Due to uncertainty regarding the spread of COVID-19,  
our modified schedule closed online on 28 March 2020  
with critical positions on the futures of feminist  
academic leadership in and connected to architecture.**

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# **GENDER AND ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP IN ARCHITECTURE IN INDIA**

**Research Symposium, 21-22 March, 2020**

Convened by: Madhavi Desai, Anuradha Chatterjee, Kush Patel  
Host Institution: Avani Institute of Design, Calicut  
Website: <https://avani.edu.in/events/researchsymposium>  
Illustration Credits : Nirupama K S, Nihal Lulu



Website

<https://www.avani.edu.in/events/researchsymposium>

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Avani Institute of Design

**Convenors :**

Madhavi Desai, Anuradha Chatterjee, Kush Patel

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## ABSTRACT

The research symposium on Gender and Academic Leadership in Architecture in India will examine the engagement of women and persons of minoritized genders and sexualities in the construction of the academy, architectural knowledge, professional identity, and academic practice. While the academy in India is often viewed as a softer, more flexible, an almost feminized alternative to practicing professionally for women (who have the culturally pre-ordained role of being the primary carer for the family), or a possible safe space for queer persons (whose bodies and knowledges are otherwise invisibilized or violently erased), academic leadership roles have not been always accessible. Whilst this is now changing, a vast majority of these positions are still being held either by men, or by privileged savarna academics and those with access to intergenerational wealth and social networks.

The symposium is interested in feminist forms of leadership. Even though we will be looking for alternatives to patriarchal conventions of leadership, we will not ignore the positions of power sanctified by institutional designations. The intent of the symposium is to bring recognition to teaching and research as practice; highlight and discuss structural changes needed to empower co-faculty and students to be in preparation for the next generation of academic leaders; and add focus to the importance of mentoring and reflective praxis.

# CONVENORS NOTE

The Instant Proceedings emerge out of the Symposium Roundtable: Feminist Networks and Academic Leadership. In preparation for the Roundtable Discussion, each set of speakers had prepared a short position statement based on the collective symposium scholarship, imagining feminist forms of leadership in architecture academia. The position statements reflected on the Symposium intent, which was to think of one or more of the following areas:

- a) Feminist Leadership (experiences and challenges of transformative administrative roles);
- b) Academic Scholarship (histories and theories of gender, sexuality, and architectural education);
- c) Critical Pedagogies (feminist approaches and frameworks of teaching); and
- d) Communities and Networks (care networks for intersectional work and support)

Speakers grounded their position statements not only within their own scholarship and that generated by the Symposium community, but also in the context of the following texts, which helped framed the Symposium premise:

Sinclair, Amanda. 2014. "A feminist case for leadership." In *Diversity in leadership: Australian women, past and present*, edited by Joy Damousi, Kim Rubenstein, and Mary Tomsic, 17-35. Canberra: ANU Press.

Moi, Toril. 1989. "Feminist, Female, Feminine." In *The feminist reader: essays in gender and the politics of literary criticism*, edited by Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, 117-132. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Education.

Hu, A.L. 2018. "You Might Think You Know Me." *Architect Magazine*. Accessed October 19, 2019. [https://www.architectmagazine.com/practice/a-l-hu-you-might-think-you-know-me\\_o](https://www.architectmagazine.com/practice/a-l-hu-you-might-think-you-know-me_o)

Ahmed, Sara. 2016. "Queer Fragility." *Feminist Killjoys*. Accessed January 11, 2020. <https://feministkilljoys.com/2016/04/21/queer-fragility/>

**Symposium Convenors:**  
**Madhavi Desai, Anuradha Chatterjee, Kush Patel**

# **POSITIONS, DECLARATIONS, ASPIRATIONS**



## **Annapurna Garimella**

We need new ways of thinking about and living the self and the community. Real leadership will need to make academia reckon with and inhabit the world; not instrumentalise it for running model studios. I am working on this but I have no nor do I seek a complete method to achieve this. What I do know is that we have to speak truthfully, be gentle and work hard with each other and ourselves. Really, really listen. Paraphrasing Sara Ahmed, whose words I liked very much, “A movement [or transformation] is what is built to survive what has been built. Queer fragility: how we loosen our hold on things. How we mess things up. How we survive what is messed up.” So much of leadership, even feminist, becomes about holding on to structures of power that need to change to produce meaning, justice, transcendence, fragility, equity, and love. Power is good; but what kind of power and for whom? For people like us, power is best when it is understood mostly as responsibility. We have a responsibility to not accept discrimination of anyone or any kind, to change ourselves, to share our gains with generosity, to foster that which is seeking to be better in our fellow human beings, to be understanding too, with human fragility and limitations. We have a responsibility to see ourselves as more than a sum of our needs and fears. We have a responsibility to care for that which is non-human. I believe we should begin to lead from this place of responsibility. Then there will be more of a chance for many to have clear skies, fresh water, a satisfying day at work, a chance to be intellectually fulfilled, an opportunity to care for someone else without fear and to teach and learn with the next generation for a world that has been changing always.



## Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi

“We.” Collectivity is a powerful and transformative practice (for life) and medium (for work). With profound respect for and recognition of our convenors’ remarkable vision, as well as its achievement to date, I would like to analyze how best to take up their torch. While “leadership” and “networks” are important means, these terms themselves grow out of capitalistic and neoliberal scaffolds that reinforce asymmetries, and privilege the singular subject—a colonizing subject (as Sylvia Winter writes) that is, more often than not, gendered dominant (whether that power or hegemony be male / binary / cis- / hetero, expressed through religion / caste / class / race, or even whether it be a minority’s appropriation of or assimilation into forms of dominance). As many in this group do in their different practices, how do we acknowledge such asymmetries without expending needed reserves of energy resisting them, and instead produce mutual power (rather than ‘leadership’) and collectives (rather than ‘networks’)? I draw from the work of Peg Rawes in imagining (with Spinoza) interdependencies of care and their possibilities for mutual sharing and reinforcement. How to furthermore make such collectivity rich with such critical interdependencies—tethering ourselves together so that there is no greatest and no least, yet all may strive independently and together toward actualization? How to make such collectivity legibly intersectional—so that we heed Audre Lourde’s injunction against reproducing exclusivity (with legibility itself going to the heart of architectural abstraction, projection, and representation)? There are many contradictions and conflicts embedded into this proposal, which we can surely see in our own lives, work, and scholarship, and need not be explained to this group. My humble contribution (in my symposium paper and broader body of work—sited in camps as much as universities), is to build radically expansive methods for collaborative historiographical practice. These are rooted in an expanded citational practice and the scholarly acknowledgement of a wide archival field—seeing, naming, and mobilizing epistemological sources as inclusively as possible. The thinkers in my panel seemed to share such an approach—Reshma Mathew and Fathima Jilna radicalizing “conversations and alliances” as epistemological fulcrums, or Rajshree Rajmohan turning to an artistic intervention by Mona Hatoum that produces a gutting figuration of Palestine (a margin, with which to think). The convenors have forged a demand and made a space for the seeing and naming of such practices, hopefully creating a bulwark against the “homelessness” Anuradha Chatterjee analyzes for us. As we write, teach, and think across difference and division, from the territorial to the individual level (that is, from Kashmir to our kitchens), I hope that a sustained critical collectivity becomes our brokering method.

## Anuradha Chatterjee

For me feminist leadership emerges out of a personal and lived approach. It is not an abstract or a theoretical concept with all the expected keywords. However, it is as much about the right words as it is about the right actions, right actions being empathetic, considered, flexible, supportive, as well as tough, political, strategic, timely, and effective. These are not binaries, or masculine or feminine, or that they are both, simultaneously and/or interchangeably. To me leadership is not feminist, if it is self-absorbed. If I cannot look past my desk, my life, my deadlines, my immediate needs, I am not capable of feminist leadership. To me feminist leadership is one that does not validate my experience over that of others, and I am never engaged in a competitive space of narrative, of whose narrative is empowering or empowered. I am the only one who knows my life, the only one who ever will, and I am in charge of my life, my narrative, and my power lies therein. My leadership is feminist if I acknowledge my privilege, every day, as well as grieve the power that was taken away from me, even before I was born, without feeling shame or anger, in front of women, who may respond, “But I was so lucky to have a supportive family.”

In architecture, feminist leadership for me is the freedom to question canons, mix texts that do not naturally mix, researching topics I should not be interested in, not researching topics I should be interested in. It is about the right to intellectual and disciplinary loitering (to reference scholarship of Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan, and Shilpa Ranade), dressed in whatever academic merits/badges of honour/acumen I wish/select, at any time I like, without worrying about someone who is going to “put me in my place”. Architectural academic leadership is feminist when I can change my mind, about what is my core specialization, and my research identity, with the emphasis being on the right to change my mind. I am not fickle, or restless. I am a feminist leader if I can empower students to seek out mentors of all genders, expertise, experience, approaches, if I can empower them pick their own path, make up their own mind, and have control on their own lives. I am a feminist leader if I can inspire faculty members to stay with academic practice and see value in it and in the work that they are doing, and hope that they one day they succeed me in taking on leadership roles. Feminist leadership cannot be about jealously guarding ones place. It is about making space.

## Arul Paul

There is this assumption, even today, and even within academia, that architecture is neutral in terms of gender and sexuality. Many still consider gender, sexuality, race, and class, as not having a direct relationship with the practice of architecture. Joel Sanders, in his introduction to *Stud – Architectures of Masculinity*, identifies architecture as one of the subjectivating norms that constitute the performance of gender.

In *Behind Straight Curtains* – a queer feminist critique of the structures of heteronormativity and sexism, by which aspects of gender and sexuality related to the built environment are repeatedly reduced, ridiculed or neglected – architect Katarina Bonnevier calls for an architectural shift away from repressive structures, and towards a built environment that resists discrimination and dismantles hierarchies.

“Feminist, queer, and trans perspectives help transition the male-dominated, heteronormative, and cis-gendered body of architectural knowledge from an exclusive logic of oppositional otherness to a radically, and generously inclusive activity”.

Dirk Van den Heuvel and Robert Gorny

I agree with those of you who say that the onus is now on the educator to first go through a process of what Ahmed calls disorientation and reorientation. As mainstream critical theory continues to be miles ahead of architectural discourse, we in academia and practice need to bridge the gap between critical queer and feminist theory and architectural discourse.

## Czaae Malpani

It has been enlightening and affirming to hear the plurality of perspectives presented here, through both in/formal channels, which investigate experiences of exclusion, oppression, marginality, through various modes of representation, across a variety of sites. Equally enlightening, are the moments of resistance.

In thinking of how these perspectives intersect, a common thread that emerges for me is that there continues to be a kind of 'Roarkization' of the architectural student/ subject, even if it is not as explicit anymore. This is despite our attempted engagement with the world in these years. Yet, this engagement happens and culminates under 'sanitized' testing conditions of a lab/ studio. A significant factor for this remains the centrality afforded to orthographic architectural representation. Moreover, despite valiant efforts, the larger rubric of architectural education still remains relatively rigid, perhaps thanks to the Council of Architecture Mandate and perhaps, due to our willingness to accommodate it, which we could certainly start to question.

It is within this, perhaps, that I would situate a problematic splitting of identity, almost a bipolarity, with its concomitant anxiety. I see this kind of anxiety, this existing at the margins and trying to counter hegemonic narratives, to counter being silenced, to counter invisibility, seeping through quite a few voices, irrespective of age and/or experience. You are left grappling, if you do not or can not allow yourself to align with the larger masculine project of the discipline.

In thinking of feminist leadership then, the need to question and the making and providing of the space to question, emerges as a cornerstone. It lies in a recognition of inherent and inculcated structures of power, and the desire to mitigate it.

I think of the adage "it takes a village," and it seems to me we have the wonderful beginning of one here, thanks to the efforts of the conveners!

## Farzana Chohan

The symposium presentations are the most powerful collection of ideas on leadership in architecture. The common themes and universal lived experiences on how each one of us had to navigate and continue to navigate the corridors of power reminds us that our work will continue for an unforeseeable future. GRIT is the key factor ingrained in each of us regardless of our worldly identities, which has supported us in continuing on the leadership path. Agreeing with all other writers on this forum, I think leadership both inside and around architecture, in academia and industry, needs to focus on “individualistic, internal shifting of our thought processes and unconscious bias about feminist leadership.” I say this, because I have heard men in industry saying that, “you are so many women in academia and executive council, still you don’t support / promote other women, whether they are getting a large project, an award, speaking engagement or promotion”. This symposium is providing us an opportunity to work on what is internalized in us and the externalization of leadership masked under masculinity.

## **Fathim Rashna Kallingal and Saira James**

This symposium has become an eye opener to us. The collective thoughts and loud statements have given us opportunity to think beyond. We believe that feminist leadership is beyond concept. It is life. It's not just about the issues faced by women, such as gender stereotyping, or attitude harassments or lack of visibility or difficulty in attaining and/or sustaining an influential position in an organization etc. It is more about how to counter, resist or ignore these aggressions, how to get through this emotional struggle, how to get over these shadow fights and move on. For this we need inspiring leaders. Not as an individual leader leading us all to a single path, but a collective journey with each woman becoming a leader building her own path.

A woman leader can bring in the change in her own as well as her teammates' lives. As a mentor, train each other to survive and conquer. As an edifier, launch herself as well as her counterparts and build confidence within, to seize opportunities. As a manager, help each other to organize themselves to become better learners. As an innovator, train each other to think and act big. As a pioneer, ascertain each other about the beautiful journey ahead with a promising profession to pursue her passion. Let there be conversations within their minds. Let there be dialogue with each other. Let the deep voice of a woman positively impact many others.

## Gauri Bharat and Jigna Desai

Feminist leadership is something that I [Gauri] am slowly learning/ growing into into/ realising as a professional possibility, as I navigate the journey of becoming a relatively 'senior' faculty and program lead at CEPT. Thanks to an enabling collegial group of colleagues [those at CEPT and new found communities such as this one], and some prior awareness of gender politics from teachers such as Madhavi Ben and others, I knew that the personal was political. Our feminisms developed into a practice as we collectively began to discuss how our individual (read gendered, marital, familial, social, economic) lives were intersecting with our professional commitments to produce specific trajectories. Within our respective leadership positions, there are certain attributes that we now clearly recognise as being feminist practices and clearly different from the dominant institutional culture

1. Being a feminist leader is to be confident about uncertainty and tentativeness, not as conditions of 'not knowing' but as a openness to consider other possibilities at any given point in time. The ideal architect is not one who knows all the answers, but one who can listen, adapt, without losing faith in their own professional competence.
2. Being a feminist leader is to create a culture of healthy criticality as the only way to grow individual and collectively. It takes a very confident institution or group to be willing to examine their own weakness; it is far easier to pat the collective back for reassurance. Feminist leaders can focus on difficult tasks without worrying about what others will think or say.
3. Feminist leadership enables collaboration and recognises that architecture is a collective practice. They recognise that the collective is only as good as their weakest link.
4. Inspired by many papers in this symposium, feminist leadership can potentially expand, deepen, and nuance architectural practice [and discourse and discipline!] to be much more than it presently is - the agency of the architect is not just to make the next iconic building, but to fight for lower carbon footprints, more equitable public places, more equity in the professional spaces, reimagining education as shaping the ethical and moral compass of future professionals, mainstream participatory and democratic design processes, engage with history and tradition to frame a more liberal and plural contemporary moment.
5. Feminist leaders are resilient and willing to constantly fight. They are after all fighting the norm.

As I write and rewrite this, I'm wondering if this list looks like what any good leadership should be. But the fact is that that is not the case. There is far too much pressure on academics and more so on academic leaders to come across as decisive and all-knowing. To illustrate, during a history teachers gathering a few years ago, a senior professor delivered a sample lecture on ancient civilisations and described a house using ideas that an archaeologist would consider conjecture rather than fact. They were asked afterwards whether they thought it important to explain to the students that this was conjecture and not proven fact? His simple answer - "No way can I seem unsure! If the students thought I was equivocating, they would eat me alive."

**Ipshita Karmakar, Megha Dumasya, Shreya Kothavale, and Anushka Shahdadpuri**

This forum has been quite enlightening for us as young practitioners, and we only wonder whether the existing feminist discourse of binary genders and homogeneous woman groups can be rethought from a narrative of not 'us vs them' but 'all of us'. As we go ahead, we hope to acknowledge our privilege at all times, and understand that there will be lesser known narratives that should be privileged above our own experiences so far. On the aspect of academic leadership however, we feel more and more that the geography of gender biases exist at our homes due to social practice. Therefore, we cannot place the whole burden of reform on academia, but also begin in structurally redefining gender roles at home. As Simone de Beauvoir says, "You are not born a woman, feminity is imposed upon you." As a result of ingrained social and cultural constructs, we might not even be aware of the ways that we are imposing these distinctions in the home itself. For our colleagues identifying as non-binary queer persons, we find these distinctions even more imposing. There is perhaps a pride parade only once, and then after most continue to mould themselves to either fit into the binary or struggle against the binary. There has to be a change in the concepts of inclusion where we do not only employ the narratives of 'men' vs 'women', but advocate for empowering all minorities. I hope that architectural academic leadership opens up its ranks for all, and not just in likeminded circles. And I hope that adequate representation for all is presented not just in front of academic communities, but in front of people who create these brackets in the first place. Can we perhaps think of opening up these discussions in larger social circles? Lastly, we would like to thank the super leaders and organisers in this forum, who have been great mentors in recognizing the different facets of feminist leadership and also made us aware of the challenges that lie ahead



## Ishita Shah

Dropping the word leadership, I would like to position the need for Feminist Collectives as the new age learning spaces, which is defined by coming together of diverse individuals who believe in nurturing and emancipation of other individuals. Their ways of leading would be rooted in dialoguing, freewill and inclusivity of all kinds of diversity. Borrowing from Kamla Bhasin's way of looking at feminism, this collective is ever-evolving in its form, strategies and performance, in response to the socio-political, economic and cultural contexts (here, contexts could be as micro as that of an individual's background or situations).

Loitering is significant because it blurs these boundaries – the supposedly dangerous look less threatening, the ostensibly vulnerable don't look helpless enough. What if there were mass loitering by hip collegians and sex workers, dalit professors and lesbian lawyers, nursing mothers and taporis, Muslim journalists and north Indian taxi drivers, visually -challenged management professionals and street hawkers...If these juxtapositions seem contrived, it is only because we have grown used to the hierarchies that divide us. They have become 'normal' (Phadke, Khan, and Ranade 2011, 178).

Loitering by diverse groups then has the capacity to decisively disrupt this taken-for-granted segregation of people into categories and makes these divisions not just redundant, but also ridiculous (Phadke, Khan, and Ranade 2011, 179).

This form of a collective will automatically reduce (if not remove) the possibilities of authoritative leadership and exposing vulnerabilities of any group or individual. It is rather difficult to define and operate a 'space for all', without getting into categorisation or identification of some sorts; but that is the challenge that this feminist collective will take up across different essentials: be it education, health care or legal rights. Education will then be found in lived experiences, wellbeing will be governed by empathy and protection of rights will be a constant work in progress (not stop at passing of an act or not find victory in capital punishment).

In times to come (or it's already here) more so than ever before the world is in need of such feminist collectives to fight the growing fascist power across different countries. One of the intriguing aspects of the recent protests in India has been that there was no single face or a body associated with it, not even throughout one city. It was embalming to then dissent in public, discover your own political values and fight for the rights of so many without feeling threatened by your identity.

“With their non-violent tactics and inclusive strategy, the Shaheen Bagh women are proving to be effective critics of the government's Hindu-centric agenda. Their leaderless epicenter of resistance raises up national symbols like the Indian flag, the national anthem and the Indian Constitution as reminders that India is secular and plural – a place where people can be both Muslim and Indian.

“The Shaheen Bagh movement’s novel and enduring strategy has triggered activism elsewhere in the country.” Alka Kurien, Indian women protest new citizenship laws, joining a global ‘fourth wave’ feminist movement. theconversation.com. February 25, 2020 12.47am AEDT

Thus, many such feminist collectives will lead and stand for the underrepresented but also for those, whose representation comes at a cost, unseen. They will only inspire more collectives and individuals to grow and expand, not limit it to their own centrality.

जहां भी आज़ाद रूह की झलक पड़े, समझना वह मेरा घर है- अमृता प्रीतम  
(trans: wherever you find a glimpse of free spirit, understand that is my home.)

## Kush Patel

I want to structure my position on feminist leadership in architecture academia around critiques of safety and safe spaces, and begin with the words of two feminist scholars Gautam Bhan and Katherine McKittrick:

“We live our lives anticipating prejudice ... censoring, moving, and shaping our lives to evade it or, if we can’t, to survive it. Those of us with the privilege of privacy seek safe spaces. Those without face a much more direct battle to be who they are.”  
— Dr Gautam Bhan on queer fight for queer dignity (2016).

“I wonder a lot about why the classroom should be safe. It isn’t safe. I am not sure what safe learning looks like because the kinds of questions that need to be (and are) asked necessarily attend to violence and sadness and the struggle for life. (W)hich black or other marginalized faculty is safe in the academy, ever? Who are these safe people? Where are they?”  
— Dr Katherine McKittrick on why learning and teaching cannot ever be a safe space (2014).

If indeed what my queer kin and I confront on a daily basis is a violent institution, then what is the role and meaning of academic leadership? What is my responsibility as a feminist educator and scholar against both anticipatory and actual everyday violence? What is the being and becoming of a queer feminist academic leader, of my queer feminist academic leadership? For me, what is at stake is the project of co-liberation with, within, and through deliberate intersectional collectives of radical change-making; collectives that remind us that pursuits of justice and equality need constant vigilance; collectives that embody a plurality of knowledge-making sites, epistemological practices, and community actors along the academic-nonacademic spectrum; collectives that move past the notion of safety, and instead, hold space for radical vulnerability and active refusals within and across institutional geographies; collectives that make themselves palpable through us, through me and my actions and accountabilities on the ground; collectives that are affirming, challenging, loving, and fiercely intentional. I wouldn’t be here without my chosen and actively sought out queer and feminist kin, and I want my colleagues and students to feel similarly empowered and seen in their individual ambitions and our connected re-/un-/co-learning work lest the violence, conventions, and enforced neutralities of academic patriarchy erase me, erase us, and all that our differences and commitments stand for.

### References:

- Bhan, Gautam. 2016. “A Test of Dignity and Democracy.” *The Hindu*. Accessed March 26, 2020. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/A-test-of-dignity-and-democracy/article14056681.ece>
- Hudson, Peter James. 2014. “The Geographies of Blackness and Anti-Blackness: An Interview with Katherine McKittrick.” *C.L.R. James Journal* 20, no. 1-2: 237

## Lakshmi Krishnaswamy

Feminist leadership for me is about holding space. Be it a space for many voices - contradictory, celebratory, revelatory, decisive, derisive, participatory, especially the slippery, the messy, the visceral, the silent, the pre- speech, primordial and so on.. This space, free of regimentation, critiques monolithic institutions through its very presence. All the speakers, in their presentations share and articulate this kind of presence. My personal effort and attempt has been to liquefy, re-purpose and radically re-work the master's tools to make such spaces - in my presentation, in the questionnaire and in my classroom. To foster a sense of belonging and safety where there is difference. I reject scapegoating all together to build anything. Because then it is shortchanging our efforts as a collective. All of it feels to me to be more and more an embodied project than a purely intellectual one. This is not to say that such a space does not recognise and work with all that it is implicated in - the pregnant intersectionalities and the insidious power dynamics that are at work. Rather, it expands understanding, as it foregrounds the concerns of its margins. I imagine it, as much an idiosyncratic space as a coherent one, where one even presents itself in the form of the other. Here, the self is already expected to be invested in the collective, therefore, mitigates narrow forms of self-conception and self-service. There is no selling either and so it is not the act providing service in the entrepreneurial sense. It offers a location for the displaced, disoriented and the dispossessed bodies to articulate themselves, as it keeps open the promise of being altered and transformed by their presence. The smallest unit of our life is one day. In introducing the rhythms of day and night, this space allows the theatre of life to unfold. In these interactions, it is able to register whose days are shorter and for whom were the nights long? And so it wishes to root collective priorities of labour, rest, joy and pleasure. Feminist Leadership in Architecture, is about holding this space in the material and form of your choice, depending on where you are cast in the continuities of nature and culture. If you are an academic, then how do you hold space for your students' self discovery. How do you teach them to learn from loss? What stories do you choose to tell? Whose voice do you amplify? If you are on the field, how do you hold space for contingencies and the sharing of skills? How do you view and value bodily labour? How and what do you demand as rightful? Ultimately such a space is built upon how you speak truth to power. I thank the convenors foremost, for holding such a space for all of us, for their hard work, encouragement and impeccable planning and support.

## Madhavi Desai

There are many takeaways for me from the symposium. For example, the concept of the fluidity of leadership greatly impressed me. However, we need humility, empathy and humanism to be feminist leaders. Much was also missing from the conversation: class, caste, vernacular backgrounds, and significantly: sexual exploitation in academia. Most of us, including myself, constantly refer to Western theories and authors. First and foremost, we need to produce relevant knowledge for our context. I love to quote Neera Desai and V Patel here: Women in India are affected by "...different historical context, colonial legacy, different socio-cultural heritage and other complexities of caste, religion and ethnic problems..." (1985). Since the built environment is closely interlinked with culture, the social complexities and symbolic constructs manifested in physical spaces will also vary. That is why I see this issue as an urgent need.

I suggest that like the readings, we begin to share successful academic practices amongst this collective network formed through the symposium. We can write letters to the Council of Architecture and the Indian Institute of Architects as well as all heads of colleges of architecture with our recommendations. It may bear some fruit or go to the waste paper basket! We can strongly suggest gender sensitization programmes to colleges and large architectural practices in the industry. Once we have had time to collate your views, these can be firmed up. I want to warn everyone about the end of the symposium euphoria, from past experiences. It dwindles away as we all get back to the daily grind. Let us have small goals. Each one can commit to one task and we can collectively plan for three annual events to begin with.

### Reference:

Desai, N. and V. Patel. 1985. *Indian Women: Change and Challenge in the International Decade: 1975-85*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, p. 7

## **Manish Chalana**

Queers have carved a variety of spaces for themselves in academia to further research, teaching and service that align with their identity and furthers equity and social justice more broadly. In that regard queering of academia in the United States has been ongoing since the Civil Rights decades and furthered by the gender and sexuality studies programs in universities across the country. Much of queer theories were developed in these programs, but those continue to be seen as niche specialty and as having limited relevand in the contemporary times.. However queering of academia continues to be relevant in the US context and perhaps even more so in the Indian context where it's a relatively recent endeavor. Queer theories and methodologies ought to find homes outside of the gender and sexuality studies programs particularly in the design and planning disciplines that shape the built environments. These disciplines would benefit greatly from queering and generate practice & leadership that challenges heteronormative assumptions that continue to shape all facets of the built environments from homes to cities

## Monolita Chatterjee

Each of the points of view represented here are valuable perspectives which need to be shared with the entire fraternity to make this urgent conversation come alive. I feel the most important aspect is visibility and quantitative (as opposed to tokenistic) representation of the feminist or feminised and gender queer voice within our profession. It is tragic that a humanistic profession like architecture is formidably trapped in bonds of patriarchy and masculinity denying itself its true identity embracing diversity in its true sense. As a practitioner primarily, I feel, it would be the process of breaking these bonds, which would alleviate our profession to truly start designing 'with' people instead of 'for' people. And this format change needs to be crafted in the crucibles of academia which needs a complete reimagination of the architectural education process from syllabus to teaching tools to collaborative group decision making systems and as also reinventing design methodologies for the future which lower the gaze from the top (plan view) to a more human eye level.

1. This breaking into the bastions of patriarchy may require strategic activism from different angles on these various platforms as I see them (not exhaustive) Networking amongst feminist architects (academicians and practitioners), like through this seminar. More such avenues are a must.
2. Publishing and publicising discussions for visibility of such discourses.
3. Campaigning for equal representation rights within professional platforms - may require some form of affirmative action to begin with and we should not be shy about that.
4. Create platforms of awareness of gender imbalance through workshops and discussions starting at colleges, but also at professional levels (since it has been a missing component in academia for so long).
5. Campaigning for space in leadership roles, and creating mentorship for effective percolation of hardwon rights.

## Naveen Bagalkot

The perspectives and discussions here have opened up, for me, rich possibilities in terms of what a feminist leadership (I love the suggestion of replacing leadership with collectives) could come to be in the context of architectural / design academia in India. Rooted in my privileges, I dare to articulate some of these possibilities in a collective ‘we’.

We move away from the dichotomous feminine<>masculine leadership characteristics, which are framed anyway in a patriarchal academy; away from structures that render a ‘woman’ leader as an evil mother-in-law.

We imagine a leadership that fosters care—the making-visible and collective tinkering of matters of concerns. A leadership that does not flinch away from being disorientated when dismantling the support of its privileges; that fosters a slow unfolding process of orientating and reorientating.

We imagine a leadership that moves to the margins, works in the background, and centers the peripheries. A leadership that values the subjective embodied experiences in its pursuit of collective knowledge; that makes space for non-compliance and celebrates deviance. But also fosters a collective kinship of the more-than-human kind.

A leadership that dismantles the walls of our studios, academies, institutes and councils; that broadens the horizon of who can be an architect, a designer (and who can be taken to the court by the CoA).

A leadership that deliberately and carefully leaves (as Sara Ahmed says,) “the safety of brightly lit paths”.



## Nirupama K S

I have been thinking about what perspectives I have to offer, as a final year student of architecture, about to leave the warm grasps of education.

Firstly, I think I realise the value of constantly evaluating, analysing and defining one's roles and responsibilities in everyday settings, which as Sara Ahmed puts it, allows one to regroup and re-orientate one's relation to the world. This provides insights on the aftermath of assumptions one makes during design. As Naveen Bagalkot pointed out to me, this poses challenges to design education.

Secondly, I realise that I should not be scared. For now, I realise the advantages I have over knowing the kind of struggles that lie in my career, hegemonies that would challenge me, overlook my efforts, and most importantly, I realise there are constructive ways forward. From listening to the various speakers, I think leadership emerges from collective building, reimagining one's situations.

The discussions from the last couple of days made me think about what Charul Bharwada from Loknaad, mentioned during a workshop in our college about the need for community architects. Later, as I pursue my undergraduate thesis aiming to define dignity in housing for economically weaker sections, I think that dignity if properly defined, is a transformational concept, it knows no social, economic, gender or ethnic barriers.

## Rajshree Rajmohan

Through centuries, the dominant centre has designed, designated and curated what is commonly assimilated as culture. The dictates of this cultural understanding in turn controls our narratives in space making. The assimilation of architectural practice and theory in our societies, that is seen today, is wedged in the silencing of narratives of the marginalised (women, transgender and tribal communities). By this deletion, we also delete their visibility, their cultural contributions and their critique of the dominant centre. Insight into the installation by artist Mona Hatoum and the architectural theory proposed by architect Lina Bo Bardi, reflects an alternate perspective in our understanding of spatial organization and to its relationship to the text and prevalent social norms. Through their sharp critique, they offer different narratives yet their strategies resemble.

1. The need for a constant critical engagement with the dominant popular present. The need to identify the problem so that the solutions are people centric and benefit one and all.
2. The refusal to believe in constants and absolutes. As such belief systems lead to systemic violence and an erosion of social justice.
3. By making their narratives visible, parallels can be deciphered in the utopian spaces imagined by the pioneers of the Bhakti movement in India. By using their drawings, texts and artefacts, the intent is to project an alternative /egalitarian idea for the future, perhaps a land called 'Begumpura'.

## Reshma Mathew and Jilna

This paper was a way for us to confront, reveal and bear witness to biased, skewed environments that are often not conducive for gender minorities and create insurmountable instances of disparity. This has always been in practice and our hypothesis revolved around the notion that the invisible bodies subjected to such inequity negotiate these challenges through spatial appropriation and eventually, behavioural appropriation. These acts of appropriation, however, are often done unwittingly and certainly arise from perceived norms and codes that are inculcated and conditioned throughout our lives. Our intention to use the medium of narratives was for it to not just be a means of communication but also as a method to demystify this and arrive at a point of realisation, both for our subjects and ourselves.

An individual's dominant stories have a far reaching influence on their coping mechanism and everyday life. By calling the social context as gender stories, we have tried externalizing the problem. In doing so, individuals are often able to separate themselves from the problem, be less ingrained from "who they are" and see them as an external influence. Leaving space for strong women to bring forward rich stories from a repertoire of experiences and boundless achievements they've had in the past that are often dismissed. New possibilities arise from the awareness of the problem and understanding of the solution with an active engagement in conversations and re-remembering the conversations to strengthen one's alternate story.

Through this speculation, we intend to develop narrative therapy as a means to build and empower feminist positions on leadership and give value to feminist contributions to the broader professional, academic milieu. The hope is that these defiant acts of appropriation, reparative modes of adaptation and invisible stories of triumph can themselves be ways in which we address these everyday challenges, fight for and assume roles of leadership. But in order for this to happen, we must be conscious of it, separate it from our own internal psyche and wear them simply as agents to effect change.

We intend to empower each one of us to become authors of our own enriched stories. Some stories may require a co-author who can offer reflection, listening and clarification. The collaborative nature of this alliance, one that is professed and facilitated by this symposium as well, becomes a means by which we can thicken each others' stories, offer validation and draw strength and resolve from it.

## Sonal Mithal

As an architect in academia i believe in creating a learning/work environment that treats students/professional team as peers—as individuals who have a thinking mind and a creative urge. Drawing upon each individuals' specificity [their ideological conditioning, and identity] i focus upon building a collective of their energies instead of creating an environment of competition. In my work i strongly practice going beyond, rather unlearning the catalog/inventorying agenda of modernism which looked at gendered/ social/identity-based environments as quantifiable, mappable entities that can be “analyzed” from a distanced vantage point. Instead, i pursue a feminist pedagogy that is embodied, which enables the inquiry to be constantly proximate to the researcher, and which enables the inquiry to exert its own agency to emerge, resist, and contest any determination enforced upon it by the researcher. In that, i pursue and imagine my work and my teaching to never be definable or deterministic, to make visible the agency of the subject of inquiry, and to be perpetually evolving, perpetually contestable from within, and perpetually alive.

## Sonali Dhanpal

That architecture, its study and practice are apolitical, and the playing field is neutral are the two most significant false conceptions our education and professional environments in architecture have been operating out of. In an expanding world to look myopically at feminism within one's own context, practice and life is simply not enough, as feminists we must expand our perspectives to think of the feminist struggle as intersectional and recognize that feminism is interconnected to decolonization, LGBTQ movements, caste and class movements but also other minority marginalizations such as movements fighting against discriminatory citizenship bills. Consciously choosing to avoid politics and turning a blind eye to our differences is itself a political act and therefore at the start of my academic career, I see leadership as a process that I and we are a part of, challenging systems and structures of all forms of oppression, domination and discrimination. I quote here Robert Young (2012), from his seminal paper *Postcolonial Remains* "Tolerance requires that there be no "other", that others should not be others. We could say that there can be others, but there should be no othering of "the other"

In my paper, I used the anomalous sub-field of conservation with the predominance of women to make a specific point i.e. representation of women is simply not enough to engender more equitable work environments for those who do not fit the description of the cis- male architect. My panelists and I had a few overlapping ideas, Dr. Anuradha made a compelling argument to show 'sameness' does not extend to academic practitioners, Monolita Chatterjee presented movingly through her experiences how 'sameness' does not extend to women in practice and she has tried to encourage more equitable work environments and I showed how the 'sameness' does not extend to all sub-disciplines. While my paper sounded like a critique without offering solutions, it made me deliberate on how I, with my identities of race, gender, age could extend this 'sameness' through my role as an early career researcher. I research colonial contexts and urbanity, the primary knowledge built by Eurocentric, cis-white male academics only slowly changing. I thereby see my role and others like me furthering feminist forms of leadership by questioning structural power in gender relations, which often escape attention in my and our research and bring visibility to the 'other' by acknowledging textual multiplicity in my work.

## Soumini Raja

Several experiences in the past have demonstrated that a true leader is the one who walks with you and not in front of you. To me, the primary goal of being a leader in an architectural academy is to trust oneself and to assert myself as a rightful citizen of a small yet significant community of architects. This is possible, I believe, only through constant and continuous dialogue with fellow academic practitioners, industrial practitioners and research practitioners. The second significant goal is to bring to the fore, struggles of academic and research practitioners, which could even mean a constant struggle to legitimise their contribution and to wilfully mainstream alternative historiographies. As a member of this currently marginalised community, my attempts will continue in collecting marginalised non-male narratives of architecture fraternity, walk beside them and hold them close, in order to bring these narratives to the forefront of feminist critical spatial pedagogies. Thirdly, as Audre Lourde puts it “Your silence will not protect you” and I cease to remain silent.

## Urvi Desai

As academic practitioners (inspired from Anuradha's very convincing argument), we teach/ learn, conduct research, and also administer/ manage. Then, academic leadership must stem from qualities that cut across these activities and seamlessly join them as a "practice". To me, academic leadership is about developing sensitivities and sensibilities that help remove all barriers to learning/ teaching and research. *It is an active engagement for both - creating an enabling environment and equal opportunities for all, and perhaps more importantly, creating capabilities for all to participate freely and equally.*

I've arrived at this concept as a synthesis of the endless internal struggle to define an approach that would encompass all the ideas that my mind has been dwelling upon, and we've all been discussing over the last few days. As soon as I put it down, however, I realised that I had only succeeded in repeating what Amartya Sen has already proposed in 'Development as Freedom'!

My only joy in this, then, is that I have 'arrived' at this understanding.

The idea of "enhancing capabilities" is with a view to expanding Agency for all that have experienced or are experiencing gender-based or any form of discrimination, and can hence be translated into a range of activities that each feminist academic practitioner can engage in – individually and as a collective; through formal means and informal; in curricular activities and co-curricular; in academic space and industry. In essence, it gives direction and purpose to any endeavour that a feminist leader may undertake.

## Vidya Ajith Menon

As a first year student of architecture, this platform has opened up my perspectives to the grappling constraints it holds within. Architecture being a language through which we express and communicate individually and collectively, should encompass ideas, not only pertaining to the gender binaries but should also appeal to the broader section. The concepts of inclusion and accessibility that I pose to bring about, must be a collective thought. Only if we share the same understanding will we have an approach that benefits us equally. In the current learning practices that we all avail, these thoughts are not reciprocated, which is why we need a change, immediately. Inclusion of more theories and practises that are inclusive must be brought about . This will not only create a more harmonious learning environment but will also adapt our thinking in ways that combine ideas of the minorities as well. More approaches that are palpable in terms of bringing us all together should be thought about and executed. Active conversations that spark change, and that aggregates the diverse community should be acknowledged.

The one thing as a student if I have observed is the lack of exposure that we receive in terms of ideas relating to the same. This is where the learning pedagogy intervenes, again bringing to light the importance of discussions and exchange of experiences. We have amongst us many that can convey the importance of the same. So make use of your voice because all of us play a role in building a future, one without a bias, because if not now then when?



**ORGANISING TEAM**



## Symposium Convenors

### Professor Madhavi Desai

Madhavi Desai is an architect, researcher, writer and a teacher. She was an adjunct faculty at CEPT University, Ahmedabad, India (1986–2018). She has had Research Fellowships from ICSSR, Delhi, the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, MIT, USA, Sarai, Delhi and the Getty Foundation, USA. She is the founding member of the Women Architects Forum. She is the co-author of *Architecture and Independence*, OUP (1997), *Architectural Heritage of Gujarat*, Gujarat Government (2012) and *The Bungalow in Twentieth Century India*, Ashgate (2012). She is the editor of *Gender and the Built Environment in India*, Zubaan (2007) and the author of *Traditional Architecture: House Form of the Islamic Community of the Bohras in Gujarat*, Council of Architecture (2007) and *Women Architects and Modernism in India*, Routledge (2017). Her academic interests include gender and architecture, colonial architecture and modernism in the Indian context. She has been a member of the nominating committee of the Berkeley-Rupp Professorship and Prize at UC Berkeley since 2012. She was also a visiting scholar in the department of gender and women's studies at the University of California at Berkeley, USA in 2014.

## Symposium Convenors

### Dr. Anuradha Chatterjee

Dr Anuradha Chatterjee is Dean Academics, Avani Institute of Design. She is an architect and academic based in India and Australia. Dr Chatterjee is the author of three books *Surface and Deep Histories: Critiques, and Practices in Art, Architecture, and Design*, (Cambridge Scholars Publishing); *Built, Unbuilt, and Imagined Sydney* (Copal Publishing); *John Ruskin and the Fabric of Architecture* (Routledge); and contracted as the Area Editor for South/East Asia for the Bloomsbury Global Encyclopedia of Women in Architecture 1960-2015. Dr Chatterjee is Companion to The Guild of St George; Member of Editorial Board for Architecture, Cambridge Scholars Publishing; and Senior Research Fellow (Honorary), Centre for Architecture Theory Criticism History at the University of Queensland. She has 18 years of experience as an academic and has taught at top institutions in Australia, China and India. Dr Chatterjee's research interests are in architectural theories in history, feminist discourses, textile tectonic theories of architecture, potentialities of theories, generative processes in design, gender and academic leadership, and student learning cultures. See: <https://anuradhachatterjee.wixsite.com/architecture>

## Symposium Convenors

### Dr. Kush Patel

Dr. Kush Patel (they/he) is Associate Professor of Architecture and the Humanities at Avani Institute of Design. They are an architect as well as a theorist and historian of social space, participatory politics, and engaged pedagogy, working at the intersections of architecture and the digital public humanities. Dr. Patel has taught seminars on place and power, and on “spatial agency” in architecture at academic institutions in India and the US, and has developed critical pedagogy initiatives in the context of architecture and anti-colonial, queer, and feminist digital humanities within and beyond these networks. Dr. Patel is also the academic editor of PUBLIC, an international peer-reviewed, multimedia journal focused on humanities, arts, and design in public life. Prior to joining Avani Institute of Design, Dr. Patel held academic appointments as Associate Faculty Librarian of Digital Pedagogy, as an Adjunct Lecturer in Interdisciplinary Humanities, and as Institute for the Humanities Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Michigan. They received their Ph.D. in Architecture from the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan, and hold professional degrees in Architecture and Urban Design from South Gujarat University, Surat and CEPT University, Ahmedabad respectively, as well as a Master of Science in Architectural Design Studies from the University of Michigan. See: <https://whospeaksandacts.net/>

## **Symposium Committees**

Symposium Convenors and Organizing Committee: Professor Madhavi Desai, Dr. Anuradha Chatterjee, and Dr. Kush Patel.

The symposium organizing committee will review submissions and co-lead in the development of the proceedings as well.

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