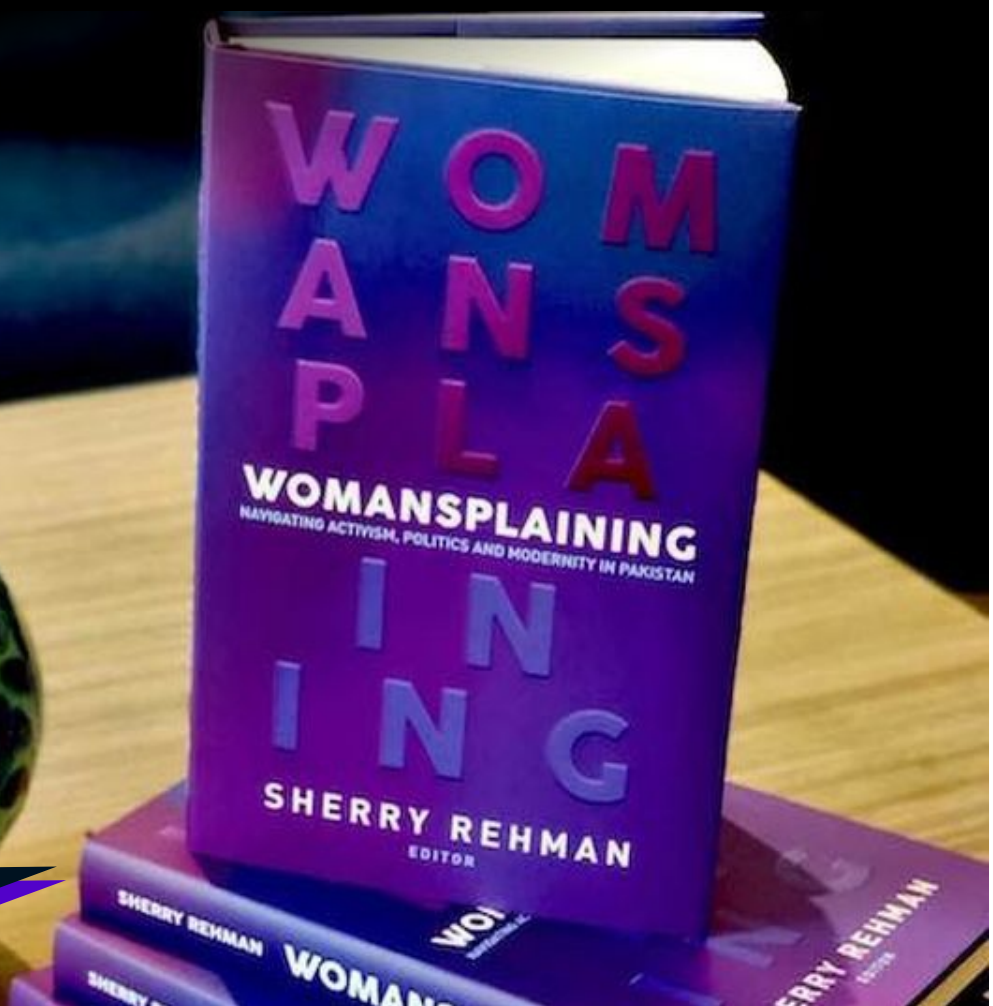




Webinar
Brief 79:2021

WOMANSPLAINING

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PAKISTAN INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPMENT
ECONOMICS, ISLAMABAD

Womansplaining

VIRTUAL SESSION



SPEAKER

SHERRY REHMAN
Senator, Parliamentary
Leader and Author



MODERATOR

Dr. NAHEED UL HAQUE
Vice Chancellor,
Pakistan Institute of
Development Economics



SATURDAY

SEPTEMBER 18, 2:00 PM



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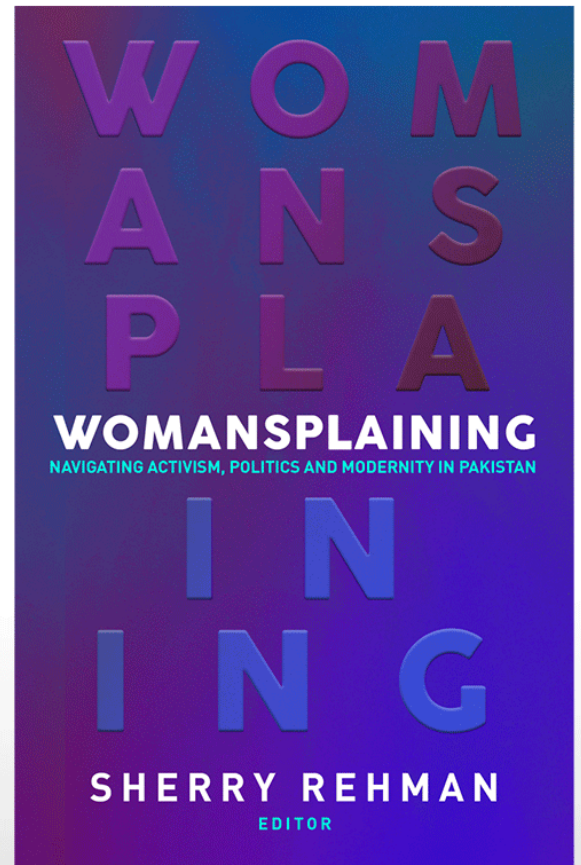
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- The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics has organized a webinar to discuss the recent book “Womansplaining: Navigating Activism, Politics and Modernity in Pakistan”, edited by Sherry Rehman. Sherry Rehman talked about the central theme of the book and about the importance of documenting histories and strategies of the women's struggle in Pakistan.

what is womansplaining?

- Womansplaining is an attempt to link several generations of women's activism and the challenges they face. We see it as post-millennial activism and feminism emerging in Pakistan. It is a surge of interrogations into the issues that women face.
- We hear about daily incidence of violence and that troubles a lot of people as it should. Therefore, it's important to look at structural issues that underpin the daily realities and set of limited choices that women have.
- The word Womansplaining is not meant to offend anyone and is not just a response to mansplaining. Rather it is an attempt about women to tell their own stories in their own words and voices.

- This book is a collective effort by 22 authors in 21 essays except for 3 to 4 authors who are frontline heroes of identifiable women's movement of the 1980's.
- We ask questions, create intergenerational bridges between the types of different challenges that are emerging, and the responses women are giving them in terms of activism whether episodic or sustainable. How they engage with political arena, with government and with the society at large.

How the book penned out?

- Sherry decided to write this book when she met a young journalist, Asma Shirazi, at Jinnah Institute whom she asked about the history and knowledge of women's activism, what laws have passed and what laws have not. Asma replied, isn't it her responsibility to give them repository of what a history has been and where should they go from this point. So, she realized that there are serious gaps in history of women's activism and felt it's important to write about it.

22 authors 21 essays

- Hina Jilani, Fareeda Shaheed, Zohra Yusuf and Khawar Mumtaz have told their own stories in the book. They have been a part of a very dark time in Pakistan's history when women's right was not really at the center of public discourse.
 - Afia Sherbano, who is a renowned feminism scholar, has discussed how they have not done enough on documenting labor and women in the labor economy. So, Sherry requested Zenia Shoukat to write about it.
 - Nighat Dad and Shomaila has shed very compelling light on the activism in the digital world and on the contradictions and challenges faced by #metoo movement.
 - Sharmeen Obaid in her inimitable style tells stories from the edge of pain that how women are suffering at the frontlines of resistance.
 - Sara Malkani and Maliha Zia have written some remarkable essays on legal framework. Sara Bilal has picked up from where our generation have not quite left-off, but they are carrying out that legacy because that fight never ceases. So, while you have the same defining fights at court and legal system, you also have the aurat march.
 - Sherry asked Sofi Ibrahim to bring her experience about climate change and what is happening at the intersect between acute climate changes and women's experiences especially in remote villages of Pakistan.
 - Rubina Shah and Fifi Haroon have addressed different aspects of literature and writing resistance. Fifi has looked at Pakistani soaps and how they stereotype women.
- How is today's activism different?**
- Today's activism is a broader spectrum. It even deals aggressively with body politics and other things that they were not dealing with earlier. It also deals with the kind of encroachments on women's rights and space that they at that time could not put to a challenge.

On women's rights in Pakistan as trade-craft

- Women rights in Pakistan are traded for bargains all the time. People are not gender sensitized and we often end up making laws that negatively affect women. Telling her own experience about traded bargains, Sherry Rehman recalled the sexual harassment bill. Normally secretary of concerned ministry is supposed to present the bill before the cabinet. However, in this case secretary had decided to make a presentation against the bill that they were supposed to pass. Upon seeing that, she stood up and made the presentation herself. Yousuf Raza Gillani passed the bill on principle, and she announced the law, so no roll back was possible. Therefore, all the male secretaries have made a bargain.

- Another bargain was when Sherry was an ambassador and have come down to Pakistan to re-open the Ground Lines of Communications (GLOCs) for NATO supplies. Government was trying to cut the deal which was not possible without the parliament. Then government had decided to open the NATO supply lines to Afghanistan because US had apologized for 26 soldiers martyred in Salalah. They were sitting in the parliament and one of their allies objected to this decision. The president said that he will send Sherry and Raza Rabbani to explain the bill to him. So, they went to persuade him, and he asked Sherry to step down from the domestic violence bill. She said that she was here in the national security context and have no ability over it. He asked her to bring a change in the bill that men also would not be subjected to violence. She agreed and the moment they left he announced that they have agreed to back out on domestic violence which was not true. And to this day that domestic violence bill has not been passed.

Women issues and parliament

- About the discussion in the parliament on women issues, Sherry Rehman said that they are very substantive if you want to push them and if you have allies in the room. Nowadays women parliamentarian no longer holds back, and believes they are crucial for bringing women and human rights issues into the public domain.



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