

MONSTROUS GIRLS AND OTHER STORIES

By Linta Rasheed

"Almost every woman I have ever met harbours a secret belief that she is on the edge of madness, that a deep, chaotic part of herself lurks just beneath the surface. She feels compelled to guard against 'losing control'—over her temper, her appetite, her sexuality, her feelings, her ambition, her fantasies, and her mind." — Elana Dykewomon.

The witch in the woods, the siren cresting the tides, the possessed woman: we weave cautionary folktales whispered into the night about the monstrous girl who snatches and devours—the feral other who becomes her rage. As women, we live with our rage as if it were the very "other," a ghost limb or an affliction. Our mothers warned us, just as their mothers did, of long, black-haired women in white melting into the night, urging us to check for their *ultay paoon*—vengeful, ugly, drifting atop the fractured seam—all that we stand to become if we house our rage, especially as South Asian women.

Yet there is a growing acknowledgement of the need for violent catharsis, a recognition of "female rage" emerging in the media. However, depictions of this rage are often cold, a slow necrosis, a smothered flame—always a wisp veiling a forest fire. Her rage is tempered, sanitised, and clinical: an outburst that leaves room for reconciliation, a minor undoing, an "almost fall." Consider the dinner table scene where the mother clutches her fork too tightly, a beat of drowned-out voices before the chair scrapes, and she leaves without a word. This quiet unravelling of the girl betrayed, the lone tear of the wronged woman, culminates in frames that taper into a ten-minute applause at film festivals. Female suffering is commodified; it carries aesthetic value. Beauty becomes an obligation—something we must attain to be our whole selves—until which we are always in process, in pursuit, and projects waiting to be seen anew.



Graphic by Eliza Masud

Women face no reprieve from their duty to be beautiful, not even in death—true crime and investigative media reduce women's bodies to crime-scene props, presenting the "pure, girl-next-door" as a backdrop justifying the protagonist's incessant pursuit of justice.

In contrast, female rage is a guttural, vicious descent into something that feels buried in our bones, without origin. The "feral woman" genre does not merely offer "permission to be bad"; it celebrates unapologetic indulgence. These women are unlikable and morally depraved, showing no remorse for the carnage they wreak upon the world and themselves. From Otessa Moshfegh's *Eileen*, whose character is "utterly real, visceral, honest, and even unattractive," eliciting both understanding and revulsion, to *Churails* (2020), which follows four women's "indecent and vulgar" overthrow of patriarchal shackles, female rage arises from the slow boil of everyday frustrations, settling into the uncouth, the awful, and the "bad woman."

The "good for her" phenomenon finds reprieve in fictional women's expulsion of the rage many of us harbour—a rage that flickers in response to a man's crass comment or social frustrations, shelved in small spaces and the *chaar dewari*. A woman's yearning for self-destruction is a fire that turns inward, scratching at raw wounds until they leave welts. Yet, too often, this rage is suppressed, resulting in a dull throbbing or tremors that shelter a shriek.

We coexist with a void, longing to feel, but when we do, we are demonised. As women of colour, our expressions of rage are labelled "hysterical" and "animalistic," or worse, reduced to male shop-talk about "crazy, emotional" wives, sisters, co-workers, girlfriends, and mothers.

The rise of "feral women" and "female rage" in media occurs amid an era of discontent—creaking social structures, existential threats, and the dread of self-creation, culminating in fatigue and a desperate need to expel this heaviness through art. At its best, this genre serves as a love letter to monstrous girls (e.g., *Jennifer's Body* and *Bulbul*), female depravity and moral decay (e.g., *Possession*), and an unflinching union with the "other."

Female rage is about taking the hollow bones we were tossed and watching them burn.

ADULT FRIENDSHIPS - A MYTH?

By Alina Izhar

I have a friend I met during my A Levels. In our two years together, we were virtually inseparable. We would walk to classes, eat lunch, and study together. She saw me navigate the glaring awkwardness of late teens in all my anger and tears. Fast forward two years—we are in different universities, each on opposite sides of Lahore. The level of our correspondence has declined severely to the point where we infrequently text after a couple of months, and even then, one of us forgets to reply. Life? It gets in the way. Or so is the excuse I make not to feel guilty about not putting in enough effort. As I enter my 20s, I am beginning to understand that the world of adult friendships is no promised land.

It is not just this friendship. More and more, I notice the same pattern emerging across many of my relationships with other women. All the media I consumed in my teens promised me a tight-knit Carrie Bradshaw and co. kind of friendship group, but the reality is somewhat disappointing. In my early 20s, I've struggled to form and maintain meaningful friendships, which is a cause for concern. So, why does it feel like those authentic, "bloodpact" connections have gone extinct, lost somewhere in our demanding lives?

Because friendships exist, I share a certain level of comfort with several women, some being closer than others. However, something seems to be missing because a mere acquaintanceship was not the plan I had in mind. I find myself traversing the landscape of friendships in a seemingly hollow way. To avoid inconveniencing anybody, I try less and less to become personal in my friendships, avoiding the messy work of crying and waiting for a friend to wipe my nose. To some degree, I expect the same from my friends. Yet, I believe that for friendship to travel below the surface level, you must sometimes go out of your way and inconvenience yourself. The acts of friendship should be performed just for the sake of offering acceptance and help when a friend needs it.

It often feels like there's increasingly less time for cultivating relationships. With our hectic schedules, endless deadlines, and the burgeoning threat of adulthood, time for going out of our way seems thinning. There is also the case of spatial opportunities that we need to consider. Primarily, our life revolves around our room, work, and class as a student. Even while taking classes, we are running either from our room or back to it. In a socially and geographically restrictive city for women, where can I meet other women in an environment not related to my academic or work life? While I do not have much longing for the time my parents' generation lived in, I still find myself envying the close-knit friendships my mother and grandmother fostered just by doing household work together with neighboring women in the absence of the men of the family. Even some culturally rooted acts fostered deeper connections with others. For instance, weaving cloth on the charkha involved women sitting together and talking for hours. Currently, it feels as if work and academics overpower the need to spend time with other women for the sake of developing proximity, physically and emotionally.

Social media also furthers the illusion that our 24/7 digital connectivity with other people replaces our physical presence. The idea that any friend is one text away and that I can check up on them through their Instagram stories has fostered a state of inaction. I still know how my friends across Lahore are doing without talking to them. I know what my A Levels friend is up to without actually having to do the labour of meeting her. Somehow, this compensates for the guilty feeling of not making enough effort.

Moreover, so much pressure is placed on romantic love through media, culture, and societal conventions that platonic love takes a backseat. Especially in a desi context, for women in their mid-20s, finding a husband is the priority because that relationship is deemed the only one that will provide safety and support. We tend to place too many expectations on romantic love as if it is the only form of intimacy that can fulfil us. If half of the time spent finding a suitable partner was given to nurturing platonic love, we'd realise that support systems can come in various forms.

There is some inconvenience that goes into manufacturing intimate friendships. Showing up for others at your own expense can solidify existing bonds. As a woman in Pakistan, I need a support system composed of women to fall back on and to also underpin my identity as a desi woman. Otherwise, navigating the complexities of being a woman in Pakistani society will become increasingly lonely and challenging.

So no, it isn't that genuine, dependable friendships—especially between women—have gone extinct. There seems to be a slight dilemma at the moment due to the advent of constant online presence, all-consuming schedules where a work-life balance is hard to maintain, and a lack of spaces for women to integrate recreationally, especially within an urban Pakistani landscape. Amidst all this, it is even more vital that we make an effort for others, even if it causes us minute inconveniences occasionally. Like romantic love, platonic love requires attention, care, and effort. Giving will then help nurture fulfilling and dependable relationships by finding dynamic ways of connecting with others.

A CANDIDATE'S CONFESSIONAL

By Abdul Rafay

I think it's hard to get to junior year and retain one's faith in the misguided notion of meritocracy, even if all the institutions in the world try to feed it down your throat. But about eight months ago, I might have been a little more willing to take it at face value. I had thought that if I tried hard enough, came up with good policies, and made some decent posters, then there wasn't anything stopping me from running for a Student Council seat. It turns out I was wrong, for what the elections demand of you is something way more sinister.

Those of you who have experienced LUMS elections even once will know that there is this narrative that student politics at LUMS is essentially just a "boys' club," but I think I'd dispute that; it's not a "boys' club," but instead it's a "specific type of boys' club"—the type to wear white *shalwar kameez*, talk a certain way, walk a certain way, and embrace traditional brown masculinity. If you're not that type of guy, you have about three months to persuade everyone you are that kind of guy because that's the kind of guy that people get behind. That's the kind of guy that people look at when they have clandestine meetings in a dark dorm room filled with a combination of cigarette smoke and insecurities—the types of meetings that treat the 14 votes coming out of the "XYZ lobby" as a matter of life and death.

That's what campus politics is: it's a bunch of people who want to play powerbroker, giving themselves inflated egos and self-absorbed power trips. It's all about how many "lobbies" you control, not about whether you can actually implement your policies.

Even the voting process itself is a joke; you spend election day calling those aforementioned "lobbies" to collect their voting credentials because the illusion of power is that important to maintain. Everyone on campus wants to be Robert Moses or Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, imagining these 25 LUMS logins equivalent to their weight in gold. The people you might have given your voting credentials to might not even be able to tell you who you ended up voting for because, chances are, your credential was traded in some kind of sick vote swap, your right to determination used as mere trading chips.

In its present form, the system only exists to satiate the participants' egos, much less to bring about bringing positive change or galvanise the student body over issues that matter. It's about who can post the "hardest" Instagram story or come up with the loudest *naara*.

I am no better. I was complicit in the system. I put on the *shalwar kameez*, made and maintained the lobbies, and sat in those meetings. I tried to join the boys club, and I failed. I can sit here and tell you that I wanted to change the boys' club from the inside, that I believed in the policies I advocated for, but that's the same spiel everyone sells, and then they close the door behind them as they walk in. But I didn't lose because I was a worse candidate or ran a worse campaign. None of that matters. The candidates might as well be marionettes on stage, all set in the mold laid out for them. It was a dirty game we all indulged in, for that is what this system asks of you.

**The writer ran for General Secretary of the LUMS Student Council, 2024-25.*

Letters to the Editor

Send your letters to 27090050@lums.edu.pk (Ayatain Ali)
Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space and should carry the writer's city and roll number.

LAHORE'S TRAFFIC WOES

By Ahmad Tahir

You overslept and woke up late. You have a quiz and just discovered that no car is available to drop you off. You call an Uber, and it takes ages to get there. Finally, as you're on track to university, you let out a sigh of relief. There's nothing that could go wrong now, right? Just as the thought goes through your head, you are met with a massive traffic jam, and out the window go your marks. (And your sanity.) It's a bit dramatic, but most of us have experienced this stress at least once in our lifetimes here in Lahore, a concrete jungle. In general, transport is one of the most vital needs in this era of huge megacities. From office workers and students to daily-wage labourers and patients, all kinds of people rely on this mode to navigate the sparring urban jungle around us.

In Pakistan, specifically Lahore, public transport facilities are in shambles. Not only do a lack of these facilities burden everyday travel, but it also results in long-term problems such as pollution and smog. But don't take my word for it. Let statistics persuade you.

Currently, around 3.8 million motorcycles and around 1.3 million cars are registered in Lahore alone, while 15.9 million bikes and two million cars are registered in the whole Punjab region. These numbers create a multitude of problems. Firstly, most roads do not have enough space to accommodate all these vehicles. Secondly, the carbon footprint left due to this exponential motorisation is exceptionally hazardous, adding to the city's visibility issues and respiratory diseases.

Many of these problems can be addressed by tackling the root cause: the public transport network. There are around 296 buses and 700 privately-owned wagons in Lahore, around 200 Speedo intra-city buses, and roughly 60 mass transit Metro buses. Moreover, the Orange Line Train, a pet project of the PML-N government but inaugurated in 2020 itself, has around 200 operating trains and covers just 13 routes, which is still relatively insufficient for the population sprawl in the city.

Network fragmentation can be seen in the ratio of buses available per a thousand people, which is around 0.12, while the globally acceptable ratio is approximately 0.5 - 1.2. People are, therefore, casting their eyes on private means of transport, such as Uber, Careem, and InDrive, as they are more readily available. These services can still be pretty expensive - especially if you are regularly using their services rather than just once every week. Inflation and fuel price hikes may be partly to blame.

An average estimate of an Uber trip going from 5 to 10 km can cost between 250 and 450 rupees. In contrast, the same would cost around 25 rupees on a Speedo, if you are fortunate enough to have that option for your commute. Unfortunately, this option becomes impractical for many people due to the limited number of Speedo buses operating, the fewer routes they cover, and the lack of availability in some areas.

Furthermore, the experience of using public transport is not much better. Most of the buses and wagons in Lahore are in deplorable condition. They lack air conditioning and clean seats—a recipe for disaster in Lahore's climate. The crowded journey can be perilous, particularly for those who are susceptible to heat strokes. The situation worsens during peak hours when overcrowding creates a stifling atmosphere, where the heat and lack of space can lead to fainting and panic among passengers.

Socio-economic problems also intertwined with the public transport dilemma. Lower-income families who cannot afford a car or a motorcycle are forced to rely on the inadequate and poorly maintained public network, significantly affecting their mobility and access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and employment. Moreover, daily wage workers who depend on timely reporting to their offices suffer when failing to meet that goal. Similarly, students miss important classes, quizzes, and lectures - directly impacting their academic performance.

The government must explore innovative and multilayered solutions to tackle the challenges plaguing the public transport network. Renovating bus stations, improving the primary conditions of buses, such as seating arrangements and materials, and adding amenities like charging ports would go a long way. Additionally, slowly investing in newer units would help meet the goal of aiding more commuters. Alongside this, mobile applications to track bus routes would allow people to plan their day and travel more efficiently.

Many government and private schools and colleges already provide transport services, yet many students and faculty still opt to use personal vehicles. This often ties to social perceptions—using public transport may be considered unappealing for specific societal segments. For example, would a student from an affluent area like DHA willingly trade their car, such as a Civic, for a shared bus? Changing this mindset requires more than just the availability of buses; it involves changing attitudes toward public transportation. This would have a dual effect as students would utilise these resources, and there would be fewer cars on the road, leading to fewer traffic jams and healthier environmental conditions.

Alongside this, private bus lanes, like those for the metro bus, could be implemented throughout the city to prevent hindrance in traffic chains and ensure smooth travel. Electric buses could also be implemented with sufficient funding from government or private bodies to help reduce pollution. Of course, these changes cannot be implemented overnight; they require appropriate and long-term planning involving different bodies, such as government agencies and private bodies. Without addressing these problems, the economic, environmental, and congestion issues will grow rampantly - maybe even tipping over disastrously if not dealt with seriously. Here's hoping for efficient transportation, being caught in fewer traffic jams, and saving both time and money.



By Maheen Mashood

TAROT CARDS AND THE STARS: HOW DIVINATION FORMS A COMMUNITY

By Alima Hasan

Crystal ball aglow and occult cards peaking through a fog of ambivalence, a kajal-smoked clairvoyant behind a neon sign claims to hold your future in her hands. For decades, this image has been accepted as a representation of divinatory practices—and it is as alluring as it is mystic.

European colonialism didn't just impose political control; it systematically devalued indigenous epistemic frameworks, including divination, as primitive. It exoticized Eastern belief systems, revived religions in more politically active forms, and reclassified as intimidating and dangerous modes of spiritual knowledge that had previously provided a sense of community and empowerment.

Students at LUMS, however, are challenging this notion. No crystal balls in sight, SSE students—eyes framed by glasses instead of theatrical smoky eyes—have begun setting up tarot-reading Khoka Stalls, bringing occult spirituality back like a 90s trend. Instead of fog, smog dulls the holographic medieval images on the thrifted cards between the self-taught tarot readers and their prophecy-seeking peers. Both engage in this activity with little belief and a lot of facetious giggles—but something much more significant is happening in this interaction. Two strangers are connected by their attempt to make sense of their future and identity. Brighter than the stars, puppeteering their fortune, is the spark of this community's formation.

The popularity of tarot culture and astrological practices at LUMS lies within the broader context of young adults and their relationship with spirituality. "I thought people would ask me silly things like whether their crush likes them back," jokes one of the pioneers of tarot culture at LUMS. "But their questions go very deep into wanting to understand how their choices will affect their future." At its core, divination is a mirror. Vacillation with a capital V is the main principle in a college student's life; therefore, young adults crave an understanding of identity, community, and empowerment. Employing the cosmos and fate as a romantic and entertaining vehicle to deliver these answers not only extrinsically bonds people into a community but intrinsically enables one to claim a connection to their past, present, and future.

Tarot and astrology's link to witchcraft in our political climate is trailblazing an avant-garde wave of feminism. In the late 19th century, the author and suffragette Matilda Joslyn Gage saw witches as symbols of science repressed by obscurantism and the Church, refuting the sinister connotations of the word "witch" that the Salem witch trials of 1692 imposed. By proposing to reinvent the term, the movement rehabilitated it as a symbol of female resistance. Young women today partake in divinatory practices to identify with the women in history who suffered for their empowerment. The institutionalisation and subsequent deconstruction of witch hunts are what make openly practising fortune-telling and occult divination such essential symbols of protest and liberation for our youth.

In the present, divination has connected communities through feminism, while in the past, it was one of the trade goods delivered through the Silk Route. Horoscopes were devised at the foundation of capital cities, such as Baghdad and al-Mahdiyya, to foretell futures. This practice spread throughout Central and South Asia, influencing cultures and traditions that connected people across continents. From the emperors planning their conquests to the farmers predicting their crop turnover, everyone claimed astrology. When young adults like the students at LUMS search *Elle* Magazine for their horoscopes to joke about them with their friends (and secretly hope for them to prove true), they revive the vibrant heritage and accessibility of divination that our ancestors practised. I can't prove if astrology holds our future, but it does connect us deeply to our history.

Travelling from witches to Silk Route traders to LUMS Khoka stalls, divination has experienced changes in its perception and practice. But what has yet to change is its ability to encapsulate the human condition. Humans will always be in search of answers to existential questions. We seek different methods to elucidate the purpose of our existence. While tarot cards and horoscopes may not be accurate or reliable sources for these answers, they succeed in giving us an outlet to formulate ideas of what it means to be human. There's togetherness and vitality when we read each other's futures and find a way to bond over the confusion of being a young adult. I can't think of a deeper and more meaningful experience than that.

THE DOOM OF INTELLECT

By Fatima Sajid

If you are a self-proclaimed bookworm, you might already be familiar with the world of BookTok - a subcommunity on TikTok that focuses on books and literature. By posting recommendations, reviews, and discussion videos, BookTok helps introduce new authors and can be credited with the resurgence of reading among young audiences, primarily women. However, what may seem to be a haven for book lovers and a chance to find a wholesome community, has become a place where popular books mainly focus on marketability rather than actual artistry. A place where you could geek about your favourite books has become more like a battlefield, where the same redundant authors and their fans are fighting for hegemony.

As someone deep into the world of books, I have noticed that popular books follow similar cliched themes and let authors often get away with lazy writing. Recently, romance novels have followed similar character tropes: the male lead is a jack of all trades, portrayed as tall with unnatural eyes, while the female lead is a damsel in distress. The stories lack depth and originality; authors sell formulaic, lazy books instead of literature.

Last year, submitting to BookTok recommendations, I read *A Spanish Love Deception* and *The Love Hypothesis*. If you were to count every time the author mentions the 'blue orbs' of the male lead, you would probably lose your mind by the end. Perhaps you can let a few authors get away with producing such books, but with BookTok, it's as if tropes such as 'rivalry to lovers' or 'fake dating' are gospels everyone needs to follow. Now, there is nothing wrong

with reading an easy book for pleasure and familiarity, but let's not allow redundant and stereotypical plots to overshadow the immense value of a well-written novel.

As if the popularity of BookTok recommendations wasn't enough, BookTok's favorite authors, like celebrities, have huge fan followings. Fans are quick to defend anything these authors put out. Among these fans are self-proclaimed book critics, focusing on fulfilling a metric instead of focusing on the characters, plot, or inclusivity. A book is a piece of media meant to be read and then stripped, critiqued, and analysed from different perspectives. BookTok creators, with their aesthetically pleasing backgrounds of perfectly aligned bookshelves, would interest any passerby with the books they discuss. They don't thoroughly critique the books; rather, they only mention the tropes and their favourite scenes to lure people into purchasing the books, after which they become mere decoration pieces as the creators find another book to market.

Moreover, these creators and authors often ignore the essential and underlying themes of the book they are discussing. This is particularly evident in the case of Colleen Hoover and her book *It Ends with Us*. While the book deals with serious themes of domestic violence and abuse, the press surrounding the book—and its movie adaptation—has somehow avoided mentioning this critical factor. It is the perfect example of how a book that delves into the horror of the domestic abuse cycle was turned into

a fairytale, with florals, friendships, and female empowerment. This can be critiqued as a capitalistic move, commodifying feminism and other social issues, resulting in poor, watered-down explorations of issues of representation, visibility, and power.

Colleen Hoover is one of the first authors whose fame can be credited to TikTok. Before we even come to critiquing her writing, I think it's important to note how BookTok completely ignores her romanticised male characters and hides the abuse and other "red flags" in her plot and characters. Her books can have adverse effects on the impressionable young teens who are introduced to them via this platform, as they normalise toxic relationships presented as romantic. It may cause young women who have not experienced a healthy relationship to latch onto the behaviours and actions of these fictional men because they are portrayed as appropriate and affectionate. I'm not claiming that readers don't have agency or will believe everything they read; however, the inundation of books with such plots and the fan-following of such authors suggests that, at some point, lines between fiction and real life can blur—especially for people who love romanticising life (just to make it less mundane).

Even when BookTok showcases a 'strong female lead', the entire narrative revolves around 'fixing' the troubled male lead. This trope follows in the famous BookTok book *A Court of Thorns and Roses*. While compelling, it can unintentionally affect readers, especially impressionable young teenagers. By centring on the idea that love alone can 'save' someone from their problems,

these stories risk normalising unhealthy relationship dynamics. Young female readers may believe that it is their role to take on an emotionally nurturing or self-sacrificial position in relationships, which can foster unrealistic expectations and place undue emotional burdens on them. This portrayal can unintentionally reinforce the idea that a woman's worth lies in her ability to support and heal a partner, rather than in her own growth and well-being.

Finally, the BookTok phenomenon has also been connected to the closure of Z-Library, a well-known online resource for free e-books. The site was a beloved and cherished place for many readers, particularly those with low incomes who depended on it to obtain books. However, once Colleen Hoover and other famous YA author fans began mentioning the site in their videos, publishers and authors pressed for legal actions, resulting in the eventual shutdown of the beloved resource.

In conclusion, there is no denying BookTok's impact on the literary community. It can decide whether a book lands on the New York Times bestseller list. It has also succeeded in increasing the number of readers. Readers, however, need to pay attention to the calibre of the books being advertised and the actual variety within them. When popular books include negative stereotyping and a tendency for sloppy and repetitive writing, readers should pause and think whether reading should still be viewed as a means to increase intellect when so many books, especially from authors popular on BookTok, have plots and writing worse than those on Wattpad or Ao3.

CAL I, MID I, CLOUD -1...MAYBE NOT

By Mahnoor Rashid

From our correspondent, a victim.

It was a quaint Sunday evening. People were on their usual business about LUMS, armed with laptops and the *Bata ki chappal* that has been stuck with them since freshman year when the dupe Nike Air Forces became too much of a hassle to wear daily. They'd already spent a *ghanta* at Khokha, another at PDC, and now a *ghanta* at IST awaited them. As they made their way through HSS, it was hard not to notice a freakish amount of laced converse.

Who could care so much?
And what are so many of them doing here?
On a weekend?
In the fifth week of classes?
Ah!
A midterm*. Freshmen *ka*.

By the looks of it, the entire Academic Block seemed booked for the auspicious welcome, courtesy of the adults stuck teaching Cal I to those just-barely-adults themselves, the bravest of the brave from the Noether wing, SBASSE. Under these arrangements, four hundred, presumably 'best minds in the country' gathered to prove their mettle at...Maths.

'*Bai haath ka khel hai*,' Moms were assured last night. But deep down, they knew what was at stake-Everything: Dreams of writing 'The Bay Area, San Jose' in their Instagram descriptions, getting a little extra from Nani's on Eid than the rest of the cousins, and tagging along with 'The' cool people who owed their grades to them.

We assume being good at Maths is the ultimate sign of intelligence. Debunking this, a Maths professor at Carnegie Mellon University in the US, Po-Shen Lo, shared a fascinating insight: When he asked mathematicians what sparked their interest in Maths, the answers were more or less the same: someone in their childhood told them they were good.

It's as simple as telling someone they're good to make them good. But does everyone get told? Not necessarily. Our freshmen owe it to 'sheer dumb luck,' as Professor McGonagall would say, that they were ever told they were good.

How is it luck? Picture this: our awkward, skimpy kid blurs out the correct answer to 2+2 in a stifling little classroom. It doesn't matter what subject the class is. The important part is what's about to follow: more correct answers. A thing as impossible as it sounds, but I guess when you've never caught a single ball in your life, you have an awful lot in the luck reserve. Anyway, the feeling of getting the thing right, the perfect, flawless, one universal answer, is pure ecstasy, bolstered into confidence by a public show of appreciation by teachers and peers. The ego boost, however, is addictive. Addictive enough to have our kid look for it every time from that moment onwards on test scores, grades, correct answers—all the quantitative tools in our world to ensure they haven't lost the 'magic.'

Maths is the foremost of these quantitative tools, and it is the ultimate test. You might be flunking every class, but if you got an A in Maths, you were a proper prodigy. And the freshmen were, in fact, flunking every class (I hacked your LMS), so why not have a Maths midterm and prove to the world that college isn't hard on you - you just weren't focusing. Einstein probably couldn't do Islamic Studies and Biology, too. Maths is all that matters. (And CS, but for some bad reason, someone blew up the curve, so it'll damage the rhetoric here.) But...it didn't really happen.

The redemption they'd waited 6 weeks for didn't come.

Six weeks of cats, crows, and deciding if you've met the person in the seat next to you because it would be wrong not to say hi, but then was the first acquaintance good enough for the second greeting? *Itna Cal soch liya hota to halaat faraq hotay.*

Nahi.

SSE freshie to freshie, you would've been crying either way, given your love of perfectionism perpetually fuelled by the fool-proof answers Redspot had been feeding you for the last five years. College Cal is just different.

But that aside, how agonising does a zero look? Assuming your passport's green and you have a father obsessed with cricket metaphors: *Batsman jitna bhi acha ho o par out ho jata hai*. To the batsman, that's life: living with a public transcript spotted with zeros here and there. Now you thought one person hacking into your LMS was bad. Moreso, they need to quickly get over the *zero kiyonkay agla match bhi khelna hota hai*. For reference to how hard this is: how alive did you feel after seeing your marks? How alive did you feel when you heard about *kisi ke 20 number?*

Now, to advise anyone to develop sportsman grit is highly hypocritical of someone who hasn't played any sport since LUMS applications opened, and sort of impractical to apply because to be in sports, you need to start as early as two and being twenty years behind isn't helpful. As your Cal Mid I grade will happily remind you when the semester-end GPA comes around. But besides Cal putting the aforementioned dream and perks at stake, it hasn't hurt much, right?

You take a roundabout from SDSB to SAHSOL without the liberty to cut through the Shirazi Complex. PDC chai is Rs. 80 again. 8 am classes are a bit easier because we've given up on dressing nicely. We have a bit more people to say hello to. Someone or another to have lunch with. Two group projects next week to play tic-tac-toe. And a new midterm to dread.

*The author is well aware that you know it wasn't the first but the second midterm for the SSE freshies.

THE ROARING 60S (OR HOW NOT TO BOOST THE NATIONAL ECONOMY)

By Maarij Ali Tarar

Ask your grandparents about the one period in Pakistan's history they are likely to recall with some sense of pride; it will be the 1960s. Pakistan's first decade under military rule saw it go from strength to strength. General Ayyub Khan's sagacious economic planning gave us two huge dams, the world's largest irrigation network, and a robust economy that was able to withstand the pressure of a full-fledged war. Touted as the 'Decade of Development' in our Pakistan Studies textbooks – when Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew at an average of 6% (per annum) for close to a decade – the 1960s saw Pakistan at the peak of its economic growth and well on its way towards becoming one of the 'miracle economies' of the Third World. In today's world, amid the uncertainty of a tottering political edifice and an economy running on hopes and remittances, the stable growth of the 1960s offers a model of growth that Pakistan could replicate to pull itself out of its fiscal difficulties.

Or does it?

With poverty at an unparalleled 40% and Chief Economist in a renowned think-tank publicly decrying the concentration of wealth in the hands of the "22 families", the 1960s culminated in uproar and uprising, as the masses took to the streets and forced Ayyub Khan to resign. The Decade of 'Development' was a study of how capitalism could go very, very wrong. But how did such a shambolic state of affairs arise in the first place? Why did the high economic growth not translate into greater wealth for the bottom strata of the population? A spectacular GDP growth rate of 6% (that too for close to a decade), hand-in-hand with a poverty rate of over 40%, is surely one of the most prominent entries in the long list of 'Only in Pakistan' moments. A superficial look at the problem might blame the 22 families, which had become a byword for the stranglehold of a small group of people over economic decision-making. However, they were only a symptom of the problem. The real issue was that the growth of the 1960s was exclusionary and unequal by its very nature. In other words, the Decade of Development was inherently skewed towards favouring the elites of Pakistan.

Furthermore, even though the 22 families controlled a third of industrial assets, 80% of banking, and 79% of insurance, and had Ambani-esque levels of wealth at their disposal, they couldn't have impacted the economy as a whole because these sectors in themselves were only a small portion of it: the industrial sector comprised only 10% of the total Gross National Product (GNP). Instead, the agricultural sector – and the unprecedented growth in it known as the Green Revolution – constituted the bulk of Pakistan's economy. As Ayyub Khan grabbed power in a coup in 1958, 75% of Pakistan's labour force was employed in agriculture, 55% of its national income was derived from the same source, and 90% of the population resided in rural areas. Thus, the agricultural sector was crucial to the economy. Here, the in-built deficiencies of Ayyub Khan's growth model came to the fore in the Green Revolution, which greatly exacerbated existing inequalities between small and large landowners. Inspired by advancements in agriculture in the West, the Ayyub Khan regime introduced irrigation facilities (tube wells and canals) and the imported technology package of high-yielding variety (HYV) seeds, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and tractors in an effort to improve agricultural output.

The results were nothing short of spectacular; the annual growth rate (on average) of the agricultural sector skyrocketed from a measly 1.4% in 1949-58 to 3.7% in 1959-64 and 6.3% in 1965-70. While impressive, this increase in output was not uniform across the country. The technology package of tube wells and tractors that drove these impressive growth rates was restricted only to certain portions of the Punjab. Of the 18,909 tractors in use in the country by 1968, 38% were in Multan Division, and 20% were in Lahore and Bahawalpur Divisions. Even within these regions, growth was restricted to just the large landowners (owning more than 25 acres of land): 70% of tubewells were installed by these large landowners, while farmers owning less than 13 acres installed only 4% of tube wells. As the preeminent sociologist Hamza Alavi noted, "Private tubewell development is closely relative to the concentration of land in large farms."

Since tractor ownership patterns also had a close link with tubewell ownership patterns, with 75% of tractors being operated on farms that already had tubewells, it becomes clear that only a small number of large farmers (owning more than 25 acres) in certain portions of Punjab benefited from the new technology package and the heightened agricultural productivity associated with it. Just how small this group was becomes clear when considering how many owned more than 500 acres of land. In the '60s, there were only 6,000 such landowners in Pakistan and they constituted only 0.1% of total landowners, but altogether they owned a staggering 7.5 million acres or 15.4% of total land. The underlying logic behind this disparity was that only large landowners and cash-crop farmers could afford the high costs of installing tube wells, importing tractors, and purchasing HYV seeds for each sowing season. However, the result was that most farmers could not partake in the fruits of the Green Revolution and were left in abject poverty.

Even as the Green Revolution improved the lot of the few and impoverished the many, it had important secondary effects. For one, the increased demand for commodities. When questions of output are left to the merciless forces of demand and supply, and the cold-blooded calculus of the free market determines the distribution of goods, such results are only to be expected. Thankfully, Pakistan is not a free market economy, and the government has a huge role to play in the economy. Unfortunately, it has rarely used that role to have a positive impact. It is easy to put down Ayyub Khan for the exclusive nature of his policies, but what else could he have done? Land reforms, for one. Ayyub Khan's military regime undertook land reforms in 1959 with the following basic provisions: no individual could own more than 500 acres of land, and the government would take over the excess land and sell it to landless peasants. On paper, this was an excellent opportunity to equalise the basis of the country's agricultural economy. However, due to faulty measurements and exploitation of legal loopholes, the reforms impacted only 763 out of 6,000 farmers owning more than 500 acres. Moreover, the government recovered only a small portion of their land, more than half of which turned out to be barren and undeveloped.

Not only was the acquisition of land ineffective, but the redistribution process was also plagued by inefficiency and corruption. By 1967, 50% of the recovered land was stuck in bureaucratic limbo, 30% had been auctioned off to wealthy farmers and military officials, and only 20% was distributed to the landless peasants who were supposed to be the actual beneficiaries of the reforms. In addition to land reforms, measures such as offering credit to small farmers and subsidising key crops like wheat to increase their incomes would have helped them avail of the Green Revolution technology package. As we look at Pakistan's economy today, the role of agriculture has somewhat diminished; the lessons of the Green Revolution, however, remain as relevant as ever. If our GDP is growing at record rates but the elites are enjoying Ambani-esque lifestyles while the ordinary person lives in poverty without access to clean drinking water, quality healthcare, or affordable housing, those growth statistics can be discarded as nothing but fancy doodles.

It is imperative to remember that unrestrained growth guided by a hideous neoliberal logic is not the way to go. Economic growth can be a source of general affluence and prosperity, but only if concerns of inclusivity and plurality mediate it. Such growth will only happen if there is a genuine concern at the higher echelons of government for the marginalised and peripheral communities of Pakistan. With government functionaries planning a Green Pakistan Initiative and speaking of 'regain[ing] the lost glory of the Green Revolution' in the past few months, one can only hope that the lessons of the 1960s are remembered.