

dear residents

Women Defying the Odds

October 13, 2024

Dear Residents,

One of the most remarkable women in my family was someone I never met. She was my great-great grandmother. [Abadi Bano Begum](#) (Bi Amma) was 27 when she was widowed. In the wake of the failed [1857 War of Independence in India](#), where many of her extended family perished, she believed the only way to ensure the freedom of India was through education. One of her sons, [Mohammad Ali](#), went on to study history at Oxford University and became a political activist in British India. When he was imprisoned, she carried on his mission, travelling across India raising funds for the independence movement. She went on to be known as Bi Amma (big mother). Even Gandhi referred to her as his mother.



I attended a mixed gender school in Karachi – but boys outnumbered girls 3:1. In an otherwise conservative society, where boys and girls went to gender specific schools, this was unusual. My school produced some incredibly notable and successful women:

- [Benazir Bhutto](#), who was several years my senior, and went on to serve as Prime Minister of Pakistan
- [Sherry Rehman](#), who was my classmate, is a current senator in the Pakistan Government
- [Sabiha Sumar](#), who was also my classmate, has produced several movies, winning many international awards
- [Nazia Hasan](#), who was one year junior to me and went on to become a celebrated pop star

- [Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy](#), is an activist filmmaker and the recipient of two Academy Awards, seven Emmy Awards and a Knight International Journalism Award
- [Kamila Shamsie](#) is a famous novelist. Her novel, *Home Fire*, won the Women's Prize for Fiction in 2018.

I mention all of this to remind myself that, despite societal barriers, some women defy the odds and achieve remarkable things. Here at our program and at this university, we value the vital role women play—not just as future leaders, but as powerful influencers within their communities. A diverse body of trainees and faculty uplifts everyone. It's worth noting that the "Big 5" Fellowships at UT Southwestern—Cardiology, Gastroenterology, Hematology/Oncology, Pulmonary and Critical Care, and Rheumatology—are all led by women.

However, over the past two years, we have seen a decline in the number of women matching into our program. This year, we are making a concerted effort to highlight the diversity within our program, especially the extraordinary women at every level of our institution. Growing up hearing stories of trailblazers like Bi Amma, I developed a deep appreciation for why this is crucial. At the same time, I recognize that celebrating the successes of a few in Pakistan doesn't make up for the many who were denied a chance. Likewise, every society still grapples with closing gender gaps across cultures. When progress seems to falter, it's a reminder to double down on our efforts and strive even harder for meaningful change.

Warm regards,

Dino Kazi