

Interview with Geraldine Forbes

Geraldine Forbes
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Professor Geraldine Forbes is the Distinguished Teaching Professor Emerita, State University of New York, Oswego. As a pioneering persona in the fields of women's studies and women's history in India, Professor Forbes charts new avenues in exploring the lives and works of women in India and imparts historical visibility to women's issues from the perspectives of women. For the last fifty years, her path-breaking contributions as a dedicated researcher of women's history have inspired generations of scholars in the field of women's studies in India. Her seminal books, such as *Women in Colonial India* and *Women in Modern India*, and numerous research papers have been an enriching oeuvre for women's studies researchers. A well-known feminist historian of international repute, Geraldine is known for her dynamism, her keen interest in new research in women's studies and the warmth of her character. Her humanism and sensitivity are truly remarkable.

This interview is an attempt to revisit the journey of Professor Geraldine Forbes as a woman thinker in the arena of women's history. We are really indebted to Geraldine for giving us the time and space to respond to our queries. We met Prof. Geraldine Forbes in the apartment where she stays in Kolkata on 11 March 2024 at 11:00 a.m. Our meeting lasted for about one and a half hours, and the following is the output of our conversation.

Dhritiman: Morning Gerry! The first question that comes to our mind is that you have mentioned in your work that you are writing feminist history, and you have also talked about women's history. So, if you have to differentiate or think about these two categories — 'feminist history' and 'women's history' — which one would you prefer? Could you just briefly clarify these categories for our readers?

Geraldine: My work begins within the timeframe when people began to write about women's history. Women's history first appeared around the late 1960s and early 1970s. I was doing my PhD research at that time — researching Positivism in Bengal — and I thought I would continue in intellectual history. Looking for material about Jogendra Chandra Ghosh in Kolkata, I met a woman, Shudha Majumdar, who was the great-niece of Ghosh, and I became interested in her life. I was a graduate student then. There were no courses or programmes in women's history then, but in completing a PhD in the USA, students take a number of research seminars. My advisor had written about "the Blue Mutiny," the nineteenth century Indigo rebellion, the managing agency system, and Dwarkanath Tagore. His interest was in financial and business history, but he was open to other histories. I became very interested in social reform, for example, in men like Vidyasagar, who wrote about child marriage and other social reform issues. But what I was reading was the victim's story. I was not just reading European authors but also what was written by Indians like Rammohun Roy and members of the early Brahma Samaj as well. So, I was reading about the victims of child marriage and the hardships of widows and women generally. British authors described India as a country where women were totally oppressed, and Westerners were the saviours. Their ideas fit with what we would read from missionary writers. As a graduate student, I wrote research papers on child marriage, widow remarriage, etc. So, I was very familiar with these arguments.

Then I met Shudha Majumdar, who was then in her 70s and younger than I am now. There she was, an old lady living on Robinson Street, her son's home, where she often sat on the veranda. She had a lovely large veranda all to herself, and I would go and have tea with her. She spoke to me in English, what one would call 'educated English', and told me about her life and things like going to Trivandrum on a train to the All India Women's conference and doing volunteer work with the All Bengal Women's Union. She was a widow, which was clear

from her dress. Women of her generation generally married husbands who were a decade older, and many of them became widows. She soon began telling me more about her life, for example, that she was married when she was 11 years old. I found her life story did not conform in any way with Vidyasagar's portrayal of child brides and child widows. I first went to see her to find out about her Positivist relatives but quickly developed an interest in her. When she talked about her own life, I asked more questions, and she said, "Oh! Why don't you come again for tea?" This was just before I was leaving India for England, and although packing to go, I went to her house again. When I went, she said, "Oh! You are so interested in my life, maybe you would like to see my manuscript?" She then went over to a cupboard and pulled out a typed manuscript. She said, "Oh! I wrote about my life up to the 1930s, I have not finished it". She said she wrote it after a long train ride to Trivandrum for the All India Women's Conference. A woman sitting with her, Sally Cartwright, who was British or Australian, asked about her life. On the train ride, Shudha started talking about her life, and Sally Cartwright said, "Oh! This is so interesting, you should write about it." That was her inspiration. She had shown her manuscript to a couple of publishers, who turned it down. I imagine they rejected her memoir because she was relatively unknown except among women's social organisations, and no one was taking this seriously. But I viewed it differently. It was when we were all reading Nirad Chaudhuri's *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*. He was a good writer, and *The Autobiography* was republished by the University of California Press in 1969. I found it charming. I remember the details of his family's response to the Swadeshi movement. They had some glass pitchers and other European dishes in their house, and his mother smashed them. I loved the domestic details in that book. So, when I read Shudha's work, I was excited by some of the similarities with Chaudhuri's work. Here was the same sort of personal account, but by a woman. It seemed to me that the success of Nirad Chaudhuri's work proved that people were interested in the "unknown Indian." At the time, I thought that Shudha's book might become "the autobiography of an unknown Indian woman." I returned to the USA to write my dissertation, and I took the manuscript with me. I talked to a couple of my professors about it. One of them said, "This is worth publishing. But finish your dissertation first and then work on it." I did exactly that: I finished writing my dissertation and then began to work on Shudha's manuscript. It needed to be edited and chapterised. I had begun teaching at the State University of New York, Oswego, in September of 1971 and could not return to India until my summer vacation. Then, I began coming back to India every summer to interview and talk to Shudha. This was the early 1970s, and when I was in Kolkata, I would go to her house and sit with her to go through the manuscript. Sometimes I would say, "Oh, you started writing about this, but you did not finish." Then, she would dictate her ideas, and comments which became part of her memoir. In the meantime, she told me she had written an article, published in an American magazine, about a family marriage. After reading it, I asked if we could include it in her book. So, the book is not a straight memoir. It is what I would call an assisted memoir with all the editing and changes she approved.

This was when women's history was emerging as a field in the United States and Europe. We were having women's history conferences where new work was presented. Attending these conferences, I looked for papers based on India. At that time, there were a few American authors who used accounts of Indian women published in missionary magazines. These missionary magazine articles were about the oppression of Indian women and the ways in which women missionaries from England and the USA were improving their lives. I remember talking to a couple of authors about the bias of the sources they were using and urging them to look for other sources, but I was rebuffed as wrong. And these were feminist scholars! I thought of myself as a feminist, but even then, I believed there were different facets of feminism. To give you an example, once, when I wrote about Shudha Majumdar as "Mrs Shudha Mazumdar," a feminist editor told me I should not refer to her as "Mrs" but rather as "Ms." I replied that she would never want to be Ms and that in writing about her, I have to use "Mrs Majumdar" because that was how she referred to herself. At the time, I found it difficult to reconcile what the subjects of my research said about themselves, women and their work in the field in the USA. For example, women like Sarojini Naidu did not want to

be called feminists. When I saw how much the women I studied cared about women and how they worked to improve the conditions for women, I wondered if I should call myself a feminist historian and, at that time, believed that I should characterise my work as ‘women’s history’. I also wondered what I should call the women I was researching who cared about women but not with the same ideology as feminists in the West. I now think the answer lies in using a simple definition of feminism: women are subordinate; this is wrong, and it should be changed. It does not matter whether one calls women “goddesses” or “angels of the home,” says that “women make the world go round,” or celebrates women’s day; women are actually subordinate. All you have to do is to look at the laws, at their financial resources, or at property ownership, and it is clear that they are subordinate. And we have shocking statistics about how many women are brutalised and killed. It is not the way the world should be, and we should do something about it. So, for me, the answer was coming to a simple definition of feminism, and then I could call myself a feminist. Then, the battles one chooses to fight and how to fight them will differ depending on the time examined, from society to society, depending on one’s class/caste position, and from person to person. Now, we talk about “third-wave feminism” and “fourth-wave feminism,” including diverse ways of thinking. The other day, I was with someone who said, “According to fourth-wave feminism, we have moved past the “second-wave.” We can look back and put it in a box.” I disagreed. If you go back to second-wave writing, it is clear there were many different ideas, and they do not fit in a box. At the same time, the definitions of both third-wave and fourth-wave feminism differ from author to author, and in the end, are quite vague. Many of the “third-” and “fourth-wave” ideas were around during the period we call the “Second-Wave.” We are now using the word “feminism” in different ways than Germaine Greer or Simone de Beauvoir.

I like to think I am approaching subjects in ways that help bring about change. Much of my writing has been about women who acted in the public sphere. I believe their stories are important for girls, young women, and, in fact, for anyone of any age. I think it instructive to know that one is not “the first” to have certain ideas, aspirations, and goals; that someone thought about these things and acted before. It is very hard to strike out if one thinks she is the first woman, for example, to combine work and motherhood, to want to write about a certain topic or to travel to unknown places. If one is the first, then there is no roadmap, and the journey can seem impossible. Many of us do not have great-grandmothers, grandmothers, or even mothers who dared to break away from the tradition. Without familial models, being the first to break the boundaries is very hard. This is one reason I wanted to write about these women — to give people a glimpse of what women have done. I know this sounds simplistic, but I believe it is important to know that women like Haimabati Sen endured great hardships and broke boundaries more than a century ago. She was not the first woman doctor, but she was one of the first, and she did not have models like Kadambini Ganguly or other early doctors we write about. Kadambini Ganguly was charting her own career as a medical professional, facing prejudice for being a woman doctor and as an Indian woman. She was not in a position to mentor the women attending Campbell Medical School, many of whom were poor and/or widows with children. So, while I think much of my work is “Women’s History,” it is inspired by feminism.

I can think of other works that fit under the category of “women’s history” without being feminist history. One American historian researched census records to document how female names changed over time. What he found was a remarkable shift in the naming of girls, and through this lens, he was able to chart economic and cultural shifts behind the process of naming. There were fewer religious names as the economy changed. I think we could do this in India as well. The feminist writer and Professor Sanjukta Dasgupta wrote a poem about contemporary naming in which she noted that today it is the maids, not young PhD students, who are named after the goddesses Lakshmi and Durga. The names of educated young women are very different.

The historian who mined censuses to reveal cultural and social change was contributing to women's history but not feminist history. But when we look at Indian scholars who were examining salient topics for women in the 1970s and 1980s, for example, the economist Nirmala Banerjee, who wrote about women's work, their documentation of how women's lives were changing, belongs to feminist history. Similarly, the historian Joan Kelly, who asked: "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" was challenging periodisation, which assumed men and women shared the same experience. This work was feminist, as was the work of Indian scholars who questioned how development and industrialisation had affected women.

Today, we can think of women's history, feminist history, and gender history as sometimes working together and at other times as separate. Mrinalini Sinha's book, *Colonial Masculinity: The Manly Englishman and the Effeminate Bengali*, which documents how the British denigrated Bengali men as effeminate, is an excellent example of gender history. Gender history looks at how gender, that is, perceptions of masculinity and femininity, has shaped historical events. I think it is evident that there is tension between these subfields of history and some difficulty in putting them in distinct boxes.

Dhritiman: One frame that we are dealing with in this particular issue of *Sanglap* is gendered intellectual history. It is an attempt to reclaim the place of women within the intellectual world because whenever we think of an intellectual, what comes to our mind is a male figure. At the same time, there are these issues of enlightenment thinking and this idea of individuation. What do you think about this idea of gendered intellectual history while talking about women thinkers or women as thinkers? When you began your work in Hindu Positivism, you also talked about the Bengali intellectual history in terms of Positivism. When we are thinking about women writers and include them in the syllabus only as women writers, can we also think about them as women intellectuals or women thinkers?

Geraldine: I think it would be a valuable and interesting project, but at the same time, one would have to decide the parameters and whom to include. A woman I think one would include would be Sarala Devi Chaudhurani. I talked to a journalist who was fascinated with Sarala Devi and interested in the idea of a collection of all her published works. This would be valuable, but some of her ideas would be missing. Sarala Devi began the first all-India women's organisation, lobbied for the vote for women and promoted female education, in addition to her well-known political work. It is difficult to recover the details of her work for female education. She wrote about her goals for improving the lives of women, and we have a few of her speeches on women's issues, but she did much more than she wrote about or that we can recover from. In short, I do not think we have enough material to understand her ideas about women completely. Part of the problem is that not all women's records, especially regarding the early women's organisations, their efforts to promote female education, and their concern for social change, have been preserved. A collection of Sarala Devi's published articles and speeches in Bengali and English would add to our understanding of the time she lived and her engagement with politics, and establish her as an intellectual, but it would not provide a complete picture of her ideas.

Another amazing woman who would belong in a collection of women intellectuals or thinkers is Pandita Ramabai. She wrote about women's issues, and I think that, in her case, we have an adequate archive. A number of authors have written about Tarabai Shinde's *Stri Purush Tulana* (A Comparison between Women and Men), published in Marathi in 1882. It is a remarkable feminist tract, but we do not have her full biography or other writings by her. We also have the writings of Rukmabai Raut, the first woman to fight against an unwanted marriage in the courts (1885), but not writings or letters after she went to England to study medicine or when she returned to practice in Surat. These women would fit in a study of women intellectuals. What is interesting is that they were responding to their environments and experiences. In compiling an intellectual history, one would have to situate their ideas within the social framework of the time.

A project on women as intellectuals would have to include women we consider feminists as well as those who supported the status quo. For example, some of the Advice Manuals aimed at women, published in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, were written by women. These manuals were very popular; some were reprinted as many as five times. Most were instructive about how women should behave, and the female authors were not very different from the male authors. In the manuals, women are often constructed as immature, weak, powerless, and dependent. In the cases where the advice is given by a man to his wife, the wife's replies are childish, occasionally petulant, and often awestruck. As historians, we have to recognise that many women supported the patriarchal structure and interrogate their ideas as well as those that, as feminists, we want to promote.

Sanchayita: I also agree with you on this point that if we go back to the earlier women writers in the nineteenth century, if we go back to Kailashbasini Devi's books that are on the Hindu women's education and the woeful state of Hindu women, these texts are full-fledged books where her intellectual ideas were actually very well defined. If we think about Bamasundari's first essay, "What are the superstitions that must be removed for the betterment of our country?" and also the essays of Krishnabhabini Das, the very feminist tone of their works is apparent. If we can think about these essays, because they are much before Sarala Devi, we can find some intellectual thinking by women.

Geraldine: You mentioned a number of women who would be included in a study of women intellectuals. You obviously have thought about this topic far more than I have. However, I think the task would be difficult in terms of deciding who and what to include and how to organise the individuals and their ideas. Many women wrote about women's conditions within society. They thought about how to improve women's condition, often looking at women's roles and considering whether these could be envisaged in new ways. Judith Walsh argues that women supported many of the reforms promoted by male reformers because the "new patriarchy" of companion marriage was less onerous than the "old patriarchy" of the joint family. Others questioned the changes introduced by male reformers, resisting change imposed from outside. There is also the question of how one would discuss women's religious ideas. For many women, religion was practised in their personal space. They rarely took part in public religious debates but would have practised their ideas in their daily lives. I wonder how we would characterise someone like Shudha Mazumdar's mother, who took her daughter out of school because she worried it would be hard to find a suitable groom for an educated girl. She did not write about this; her daughter Shudha Mazumdar did but without any criticism. Would we see her as a feminist concerned about the welfare of her daughter within a society that did not have options for women who did not marry? Or would we see her as reproducing a system of dependency for women? Mapping intellectual history through practice is an intriguing idea and would include an examination of letters, photographs, memoirs, and memories.

This discussion takes me back to the question of sources and archives. At present, we have greatly expanded the idea of the archive. Antoinette Burton, in *Dwelling in the Archives*, uses women's memoirs and fiction writing to question our reliance on conventional archives. At the same time, other scholars have pointed out the value of examining conventional archives with new questions and perspectives. When I was first doing research in India, the place to begin was the archive, which included the National Archives in Delhi, the National Library, state archives, and the British Library in England. However, the archives failed me when I was studying Positivism in Bengal, long before I had begun studying women's lives.

My first experience with women's history was when Shudha Mazumdar handed me her memoir. When I wanted to research the context of her life as a woman interested in women's upliftment in the 1920s and 1930s, there was nothing in the official archives. I began to work in the archives of women's organisations: some in people's houses and, in one case, stored in a garage. I then began to look for records women had kept in their homes, often they said because no one was interested in these documents. I began looking at women's photographs

in family collections because some of the women I interviewed suggested I do so. When I asked these women to tell me about their photographs, they would tell me things that were not in other sources. One woman, showing me a photograph of the women who, with her, were released from prison in 1930, pointed to various people and told me they were her mother, sister, cousin, etc. That was the first time I realised that those women, whose names I had seen in a newspaper, were related. They had changed their names with marriage, obfuscating their relationships. When talking about photographs, a woman would remember things not included in any other document, for example, that a father-in-law or someone else in the family became ill, causing her to drop out of her public activities. Women “disappeared” from public records because of family responsibilities, but I also found that marriage, name changes, and movement to a new location made it difficult to see continuity in women’s work. This experience made me realise how important it is to seek alternative archives if we want to understand the fullness of women’s lives.

Doing research in family archives made me aware of how much easier it was to document a man’s life. I found books celebrating the 60th and, in some cases, the 80th birth anniversary of family patriarchs. These were filled with photographs, details of education and work, certificates, and memories. I did not find these for women, not just because they did different things than men but because we do not value the things that fill women’s lives. When I began researching women’s lives, I was looking at women’s roles in social and political organisations to affect change and did not realise how childbirth, nurturing and caregiving would affect individual lives. Using alternative records was the only way I could understand the fullness of a woman’s life.

I only began to think about a woman’s whole life when I worked with photographs. It was my work with these images and women telling me what they remembered that made me focus on what women wore. We are now all aware that when Jnanadanandini Devi first wore the shoes, it created a kind of uproar within the Tagore family. When Krishnabhabini Das first went to England, she was worried about what dress she should wear. I have come to think that women’s concern with what to wear is really important. In writing about Bengal, a lot of attention has been paid to the way Jnanadanandini Devi tied her sari. In Gujarat, there were debates in the nineteenth century about whether or not women could carry umbrellas and wear shoes. Without an umbrella and/or shoes, women would not be able to leave the home. Even though we do not have lengthy articles written by women about dress reforms, the women who pondered what to wear were thinking about their roles as women.

Sanchayita: I also found some pieces in Kailashbasini Devi’s books where she is thinking about women’s public attire. Bamasundari also writes about women’s public appearance. For Kailashbasini, it was not necessary for her to go abroad. But Krishnabhabini went abroad much before Jnanadanandini. So, she had to think about certain dresses to go beyond the conventional dressings. Her movement to England was not actually sanctioned by her family — either her paternal family or her maternal family. So, ultimately, she had to think about something else. So, these are long before Jnanadanandini.

Geraldine: You need to write articles about how the women you studied wrote about the issue of what to wear.

Getting back to the topic of women intellectuals and ideas, I think we need to interrogate both the medium and the audience. I often wonder how to gauge the audience for different kinds of writing. One of the ways to measure the impact of an article or book is to look at how many copies were published and, in the case of a newspaper, the number of subscribers. Women’s literacy in the second half of the nineteenth century was limited, so we cannot use literacy as a marker of how many women were aware of ideas being published. While women’s periodicals did not have a wide circulation, these publications were shared, and women who did not read these articles often heard about them from others. We also know that articles written in Marathi were not translated into Bengali, so it is unlikely women in

Calcutta in the 1880s knew about Tarabai Shinde's writing, but a close reading might reveal that these ideas were circulating. There are still other ways to gauge what women knew and were discussing. For example, Padma Anagol looked at criminal records to find petitions by women, and Pika Ghosh examined Kanthas, which made it clear that women knew about the political events of the day.

We also have to look at who was writing and consider whether their ideas crossed class, caste and religious boundaries. If we look at a male intellectual, for example, Vidyasagar, we know his pamphlets on widow remarriage and Kulin polygamy led to public debates. Does "intellectual" only apply to individuals whose ideas had a significant impact? Do we have a sense of how widespread a person's ideas need to be in order to count him/her as an intellectual? Usually, the term is applied to political thinkers, so the challenge may be to expand the definition to include women who wrote about personal issues and to more limited audiences.

Sanchayita: Actually, this is the work which I am taking forward from you because you introduced me to this field of women's history and inspired me to think about women's history in this way. In going back to these women writers and when I was researching in this field throughout these eight years, I just found that there is much more work on fiction or memoirs or autobiographies, but there is not much scholarship on essays, diaries and obviously letters. They completely remained unknown and untranslated. At present, I am engaged in a project that is actually going to think about these women writers as women thinkers. We are reviving women thinkers both in humanities as well as in science. So, this is part of the project on the history of women philosophers and scientists. I am presenting Kailashbasini Devi as a social thinker and how she thought about women's condition at that time within colonial Bengal as a Hindu woman; Hinduism not as a religious communal Hinduism but more a kind of clinging to a religious identity. Kailashbasini has written three books, but these were not publicly circulated. Her husband was in the Gupta Press. Durgacharan Gupta was the founder of the Bengali Almanac. Her husband published all these books. She did not write any article in the periodical. So, these books are published, and they largely remain untranslated. Some parts of it were published in *Talking of Power*, the book you gave me. There is a small bit that was translated in that book, but the larger oeuvre remains untranslated.

Geraldine: There are ways of finding out how many copies of a book were published, but that still does not tell us everything about readership. The *Bengal Catalogue of Printed Books* includes fascinating details about both English and Bengali books and pamphlets: author, title, summary, publisher, address of the publisher, name of the editor if there was one, the number printed, and reprints. This publication was another example of colonial surveillance, but it is now useful for historians. People often published a book for a grandmother or other woman in the family in very limited editions, but there are also manuscripts that were written but not published until recently. The 60th or 80th birthday celebration books I mentioned earlier were never published for sale; only a few were published for family members. The only ones I have seen have been men.

This takes us back to the question of how to think about women intellectuals whose writing had a very limited audience or no audience until now. Can we call someone an intellectual if she was not read in her time? There is value, I think, in looking at writing that was not widely read in its time. It proves that some people, albeit limited, had these ideas. That is important, especially when we try to trace the genesis of feminist ideas in a society. It makes me think about the two women's memoirs from Bengal that I have worked with. Neither Shudha Mazumdar nor Haimabati Sen's books were read by anyone outside the family until they were published. I do not think I would include either women's writing in a book on women intellectuals, but the discovery of both has been useful in understanding women's lives during late colonialism.

Dhritiman: Moving towards your recent works now, tell us what you are currently working on. You know, you spoke about the difference between women's history and feminist history and mentioned some very seminal works. Now, the readers of *Sanglap* would definitely like to know what new seminal research you have come across over these last five years.

Geraldine: Malavika Karlekar and I, we are co-editing a special issue of *the Indian Journal of Gender Studies* to celebrate the journal's 30th anniversary. Our working title is *Pushing the Boundaries of Gender Studies* because we want to include articles that explore innovative methodologies, novel approaches, diverse subjects, and untapped sources for the study of women, feminism and gender in India. Malavika and I have been involved in women's and gender studies since the 1970s and are hoping to encourage new and innovative work. Among our authors are individuals from a range of disciplines using an array of approaches and archives. Two of the authors will interrogate visual sources but in very different ways, while others take on topics such as women spies, musicians, and women in the Men's Rights movement. The fields of Women's and Gender Studies are rich with scholars taking on subjects such as women's friendships, women's Tarot Card readers displacing male horoscope readers, women spies, and national histories that forget women.

With this special volume and in my interactions with young people, I hope to encourage engagement with topics that have not received much attention and creativity in searching for material. I recently engaged in email exchanges with a student who wanted to study domestic violence in nineteenth century India. He had not yet looked at the way criminal records were organised or what was considered a crime in the chosen time period. It is very difficult to explore a crime that, in a specific period, was not named a crime. He assumed there would be accounts of women who committed suicide because of domestic violence, but these do not exist in official accounts, so if he wants to continue with this topic, he will need to find models of how to do this. Using literature, memoirs and newspaper accounts, he could use Aparna Bandyopadhyay's *Desire and Defiance: A Study of Bengali Women in Love, 1850-1930* as a model. It was not easy for Bandyopadhyay to write about transgressive heterosexual love, but after scanning a wide range of sources, she was able to explore the lives of women who married or remarried according to their choice.

While it would be difficult to explore women's suicides, it is possible to do research on women criminals in the colonial period. Reading through these archives, one immediately notices a few crimes, for example, stealing the ornaments of children, kidnapping children, and infanticide. We also have interesting records of the women criminals who were sent to Andamans. Padma Anagol has written a brilliant essay on women convicted of infanticide in Western India. Anagol found accounts of women testifying that they did not kill their children. She found them insisting the children died of diseases or during childbirth. One woman, when questioned, replied that she had been raped. Asking why they would accuse her of infanticide when she had already had one child to take care of, we get a hint of her biography. This woman claimed her infant had died of malaria. While we cannot verify whether this was what was said — these are colonial records where the women only spoke through the pens of officials — it is an example of how rich and important these accounts could be. This woman was a farm labourer, so this testimony also gives us a glimpse of the sexual violence endured by subaltern working women. Right now, I do not know of a specific project using these records, but someone is probably mining them.

Although books and articles are being written in the fields of women's history, feminist history, and gender history, there is still a great deal of work to be done. And for those who are studying the present, there are many questions about women's lives today that have not been thoroughly explored. I worked on the late colonial period using historical documents, but I missed a great deal of the work being carried out and published in sociology, anthropology, and literature. However, after reading some of the latest work that has been published or reviewed, I am excited about the topics being explored. Farida Begum's dissertation on women's friendships in the twentieth century goes beyond my work and that of others who

look at women's activism with political and social organisations. Begum examined women's everyday connections forged in schools, neighbourhoods, organisations, and at work in a period of growing communalism in eastern India. It would be interesting to study women's friendships in the late and twenty-first centuries to understand how important these are to women's lives. Shudha Majumdar began to improve the conditions of women in prisons, another topic that I think would be interesting to explore in the present. Visiting the new Alipore (Prison) Museum, I wondered about the female prisoners who, the website says, were housed in a separate ward. Could one write about how the crimes committed by women changed over time? What are the conditions of women prisoners today?

Young scholars have also made me think about the medium in which we present our work. I was born during World War II, before Television and long before the internet. My generation read magazines and books, listened to the radio as we got older, and, as teenagers, watched TV. We became computer literate as adults, and as many of you are aware — especially when a grandparent asks for help with her Smartphone — we are not online all the time. Last year, a young woman working with the media company Swaddle approached me about working with them for a Podcast on the Tarakeswar Murder Case. I was surprised as I do not know much about podcasts in India. However, the ideas were intriguing, and I worked with them for a few months, giving them materials and editing, and the result was "Forgotten Crimes: Murder in Bengal" (<https://www.theswaddle.com/forgotten-crimes>). I found it extremely interesting to be involved with a project that would present a historical crime in a new medium. Historians are used to including footnotes and references, which do not have a place in a podcast, so the result was more dramatic than any of my writings about this case.

Working with Swaddle's staff alerted me to new mediums that we should explore as a way of making our work on women more visible. While there are some public historians who are frequently asked to speak about their work, often on economics and politics, most of them focus on men. I think those of us who work in the field of women's and gender studies need to think about how we could make our work more visible.

Dhritiman and Sanchayita: Gerry, you have indeed inspired researchers like us to do our work on women thinkers and to make it more visible. Thank you, Gerry, for giving us this time.

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