

*Shifting Contours, Widening Concerns: Women's History, Historiography and the Politics of
Historical Representation*

An International Conference

Organized by

**Dr. Avabai Wadia and Dr. Bomanji Khurshedji Wadia Archives for Women, (AWA)
Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNTD Women's University**

11 -13 February 2015

Born out of feminist struggles to reclaim historical spaces, feminist histories have questioned the invisibility of women in 'male-centred' history. Women are absent in history because of lack of power in 'knowledge creation'. It has resulted in the growth of a historical consciousness that has ignored women's rich contribution to the shaping of human societies. Criticising conventional historiography for ignoring the contributions of women, feminist historians have sought to recreate women's histories. Apart from reinterpreting existing historical evidence to reveal the hidden world of women, they have also searched for new sources and techniques to find women in history. The search is important because conventional historiography has consistently ignored women's historical voices. Rejecting altogether the monologue of official history, feminist historians have preferred to hear the cadence of many voices in history. These voices may not always resonate with each other and may often be heard as discordant notes, but the very discordance may well reveal the rich fabric of women's lives.

Feminist Historical Quest

The paucity of historical sources to recreate women's lives poses a serious challenge to feminist historiography. In search of women's historical past, feminist historians have searched for nuggets of historical information in the musty tomes of conventional archives. They have also searched for new sources of history in private papers, diaries, memoirs and other published and unpublished papers preserved in dark, dank corners of the home or in organizations for women. However, since these written records are few and far between they leave gaps in our historical knowledge. It is particularly so, because women's writings, however, are often constrained by what can be spoken and what may not without upsetting the existing family, kinship and social relationships: For to write from the depth of their lived experiences may also invite family and social censure. In addition, feminist historiography has also sought women's historical voices through oral histories, life histories and in oral traditions. These techniques challenge accepted sources of history and question the nature of historical "truths."

In Search of Sources

The search for historical sources raises an allied concern about archival materials; especially about the preservation of sources that reveal the histories of women from subaltern communities. The search for archival materials is not confined to collecting, preserving and cataloguing official records (which no doubt is an important source of history) but also involves a search for historical sources from the private papers of men and women in the forgotten corners of the attic and family albums, etc. It also requires a search for journals, newsletters and newspaper articles which may shed light on not just political lives and events but also other socio-cultural aspects of human histories. New archival sources present unique challenges of cataloguing and preservation to archivists as well.

Conference Objectives

In order to explore and investigate the exciting world of women's histories, this conference invites papers, presentations and posters from scholars, students, social activists and archivists who have been working on women's histories and creating archives using conventional and innovative techniques/sources. Undoubtedly, since the first stirrings of the new women's movement, the challenges of writing women's histories have been discussed; and yet there are tantalizing new questions that need to be asked. This conference is an attempt to reflect and identify emerging research areas as well as methodological and epistemological concerns of writing women's histories and recovering/preserving historical records in the 21st century. Therefore the broad themes of the conference are as follows:

1) Writing Women's Histories

The theme highlights feminist efforts to restore women to history and history to women. It explores the ways by which feminist reconstruction of past histories alter accepted interpretations of history and elaborates on women's historical presence. It invites historians to reflect upon their craft and elaborate on their negotiations with "sources."

2) The Politics of Historical Representation

This theme explores the contestations for historical voices and representation and examines how certain versions of history become hegemonic. Drawing upon the struggles of women and other marginalized communities for historical spaces, the conference hopes to explore the link between historical 'fact' and interpretation.

3) Historical Sources

Confronted by 'archival silence' in conventional repositories, feminists have raised larger questions, about not only who and what is preserved to what merits scholarly attention. Therefore writing women's histories has meant mining new kinds of sources while attending closely to established historical tools, and procedures, sources and modes of questioning. The theme explores the methodological challenges of using oral histories, life histories, traditions and popular culture.

4) Interdisciplinary Approach to History

The focus here is on the dynamic interactions between history and other disciplines such as literature, philosophy, sociology, economics and political science. To what extent border crossing between disciplines can enrich historical knowledge?

5) Creating Feminist Archives

The theme reflects on the state of feminist archiving in India. It focuses on the challenge of preservation of private papers, grey literature as well as audio-visual sources. The theme also addresses the politics of archival creation, particularly digital archives.

Dr. Veena Poonacha
Director, RCWS

ABSTRACTS

The deadline for the submission of abstracts

The deadline for the submission of abstracts is 1 December 2014. The submission should include: 1) title of the paper; 2) an abstract of approximately 500 words; 3) your name along with the names of any co-presenters (if any); your institution or organization; your email address.

Abstracts should be emailed to: rcws@sndt.ac.in

The date for the acceptance of the abstracts by conference sub-committee is 15 December 2014.

Registration fees

Registration fees for University/College Faculty: Rs. 2000/-

Registration fees for PhD scholars/post graduate students: Rs. 1000/-

Registration fees for Activists: Rs. 750/-

Once your paper has been accepted, please send the cheque/demand draft in the name of the **Director, Research Centre for Women's Studies**, payable at Mumbai.

Kindly Note: Outstation participants will make their own arrangements for their stay.

Postal Address:

Research Centre Women's Studies, SNDT Women's University, Sir Vithaldas Vidyavihar, Juhu Road, Mumbai 40049.

Participant Form

Shifting Contours, Widening Concerns: Women's History, Historiography and the Politics of Historical Representation

An International Conference

Organized by

Dr. Avabai Wadia and Dr. Bomanji Khurshedji Wadia Archives for Women, (AWA) Research Centre for Women's Studies,
SNDT Women's University

11 -13 February 2015

1. **Name:**
2. **Designation:**(University/College Faculty/Ph.D/PG Student/Activist)
3. **Institutional Affiliation:**
4. **Residential Address:**
.....
5. **Tel No. /Mobile:** **E-mail:**
6. **Title of Proposed Paper:**
7. **Name/Designation/Address/Tel. No./E-mail of Co-Author, if Any:**
.....
.....
.....
8. **Demand Draft Details (No./ Date):**

Date:

Signature:

Registration fees:

Registration fees for University/College Faculty: Rs. 2000/-

Registration fees for PhD scholars/post graduate students: Rs. 1000/-

Registration fees for Activists: Rs. 750/-

Once your paper has been accepted, please send the cheque/demand draft in the name of the **Director, Research Centre for Women's Studies**, payable at Mumbai.

Kindly Note: Outstation participants will make their own arrangements for their stay.

Postal Address:

Research Centre Women's Studies, SNDT Women's University, Sir Vithaldas Vidyavihar, Juhu Road, Mumbai – 400 049.