



South Asian Feminist Activism in Canada and Abroad, 1980s-1990s: Teaching Materials

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Introduction

Students will explore the concerns and actions of South Asian feminist activists in Canada and their involvement in an international feminist movement in the 1980s and 1990s through engagement with historical materials. The main resource is *Diva*, a Toronto-based journal of South Asian feminism (1988-1996) that challenged mainstream claims to inclusion and created an independent and dynamic political space for enacting feminism in Canada. Through its networks and contributors, *Diva* encouraged feminist dialogue on a global scale and participated in an international South Asian feminist movement that spanned South Asia and the wider diaspora. *Diva's* role in sharing debates and strategies across multiple locales encouraged a transnational feminism as well as a broad understanding of feminist activism.

See Suman Kumar's overview at [Diva: A Quarterly Journal of South Asian Women – Rise Up! Feminist Digital Archive](#) Click on More about Diva.

The teaching materials were designed with secondary and post-secondary students in mind. They consist of three main components and offer plenty of choice. Instructors will adjust workload requirements accordingly.

Objectives:

1. To explore the sites and multifaceted character of South Asian feminist activism in Canada, South Asia, and the wider South Asian diaspora. The materials offer students an opportunity to learn about or further develop their knowledge of late twentieth-century South Asian feminism.
2. To interpret historical materials on feminist activism and ponder possible links between past and present activism. Ask who, when, and why the historical item was created and disseminated and how readers/audiences may have viewed it. Consider how past actions might inform debates among today's students and activists.
3. To both grasp the details of specific cases of mistreatment or protest and understand them within a wider cross-cultural context of patriarchy, class inequities, and other oppressive systems of power. Relatedly, to adopt a broad understanding of feminist activism, from writing/sharing testimonials, filmmaking, and street theatre to mobilizing resources for front-line agencies and joining major political campaigns to change unjust laws.

About *Diva*

Diva was published (with different subtitles) between 1988 and 1996, a period of pronounced activism and some significant social change. This resource contains a selection of items from a dozen issues of *Diva* for the period April 1988 to June/August 1993, as well as some additional items.

The materials in *Diva* capture the views and actions of community organizers, shelter movement workers, AIDS activists, and other front-line

activists who fought racism, broke the silence on intimate partner violence, and encouraged discussion of homosexuality and bisexuality in the immigrant communities. *Diva* features the powerful work of international and local writers who denounced patriarchal oppression, economic injustice, and heteronormativity, and produced affecting poetry about lesbian desire. The reports record feminists in South Asia, the UK, Europe, Canada, and elsewhere protesting the treatment of rape cases and mobilizing to change or resist the importation of patriarchal legal regimes and gender codes that repressed women and endangered their lives. (See conversation with Suman Kumar.)

Assignment Layout: Three Components

Part A: Opening exercise to become familiar with *Diva* and concepts

Part B: Choose a theme and complete two assignments

1. Analysis of Historical Materials in your chosen thematic cluster
2. Short Reflection Paper (750 words) on your theme

Part C: Complete a project on your theme, such as a wikipedia entry, heritage plaque, mural design, podcast, or interview

A former *Diva* member has generously offered to make herself available for a class visit. If you are interested, contact info@riseupfeministarchive.ca.

Instructor Trigger Warning

Diva's wide-ranging content includes emotionally uplifting, life-affirming, and humorous content. But many items in *Diva*, and some of the additional sources, contain highly sensitive material on difficult subjects, such as racism, physical and sexual violence, child abuse and torture, that may cause students deep discomfort or possibly trigger a recurrence of trauma.

To help protect your students' safety and mental health, warn them of this fact and prepare them emotionally to handle the content or to decide not to do so. During any in-class discussion, do not single out a student because you think or know they have personal knowledge of the issue at hand.

Some students who have experienced a trauma that corresponds to the issue being discussed may be personally ready to address the issue in an educational context, but others will not be. Students may cope with triggering content in different ways: engaging actively with the materials; withdrawing from discussion; appearing inattentive; or creating distractions during class. Try to create space for varied responses and consider checking in with or offering an alternative assignment to a student whose behaviour appears to be out of character.

Part A: Opening exercise on *Diva*: items and questions

[Diva: A Quarterly Journal of South Asian Women – Rise Up! Feminist Digital Archive](#)

1. To familiarize yourself with *Diva*, skim 2 issues:

- Vol. 1, Issue 1 (April 1988).
- Vol. 3, Issue 3 (Sept-Dec 1992).

Spend about 15 minutes on each. Look up the editorial committee (or editorial collective) and others involved; subscriptions; art & design, table of contents (TOC); whether it is a regular or theme issue.

1. Your knowledge of these feminists will grow as you read more of *Diva*, but, for now, list 3-5 points or questions to pursue about them.

For eg., are all those involved of South Asian origin and what does the composition suggest about this feminist project?

2. Comment on the cover/inside art & design of the issues.
3. Note what the TOC for each issue indicates about the content. Then choose 1 entry and briefly describe the subject matter and what you learned about it. Having also looked at the TOC, how do you think this subject may relate to the issue's overall theme and contents?
4. *Diva's* founders and editorial committee members were in dialogue with South Asian and other feminists at home and around the world. Can you briefly provide 3-5 examples of this?

2. An understanding of the category of South Asian and the concept of intersectionality (intersectional analysis) will enhance your comprehension of the historical materials. For one definition of each, see:

- [What is a South Asian? — SALCBC](#) South Asian Legal Clinic of British Columbia (2024)
- [Intersectionality | Definition, Kimberlé Crenshaw, History, Applications, Criticism, & Facts | Britannica](#)

1. Who is South Asian? As you examine the items in *Diva* and other materials, consider which groups are included and not included.
2. What is an intersectional analysis? Consider whether this analytic frame implicitly or explicitly informs the materials you examine.

3. To familiarize yourself with South Asian feminist groups in North America and in one South Asian country, skim/read the two articles in *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 1 (Oct 1991). *Total 7 pages of reading.*

- Skim Jyotsna Vaid, “Seeking a Voice - South Asian Women’s Groups in North America,” pp. 9-18, but read pp. 9-12.
- And skim Tania Das Gupta, “Autonomous Women’s Groups in India: Impressions from a Study Tour,” pp. 35-42, but read pp. 36-38.

Depending on your chosen theme you may return to these articles later. The correct spelling is Tania Das Gupta.

1. What are autonomous women’s groups and why are they so important? Briefly identify 3 groups’ key sites of mobilization.

Part B: Choose a theme and complete two assignments

1. Work: Wage-earners, Professionals, and Allies
2. Sexuality and Sexual Health
3. Sexual Violence against Girls and Women
4. Feminist Organizing and Actions

Note that feminist activism is an important element of every theme. Each thematic cluster contains a range of items, with some appearing in more than one cluster. Access the *Diva* articles and other items online.

*For items listed in *Diva* Vol. 1, Issue 3* (Oct-Dec 1988) follow Rise Up’s reference to Issue 3 (the issue itself is mislabeled as Issue 2).

Each thematic cluster concludes with A Few Additional Sources for Potential Part C Projects. They appear in roughly the same order as the corresponding subject matter appears in the cluster.

1. Analysis of Historical Materials:

Choose and consult a designated number of items in your thematic cluster. Look up all references (people, words etc.) you do not know. A summary of each item is provided followed by questions. (In some cases, a question points to a potential final project on a theme.) Answers may range from 2-3 lines to a few paragraphs depending upon the item and question(s).

Instructors will decide whether lower-level students will, for example, select between 6 and 8 items and upper-level students between 9 and 12 items. And whether students will submit written answers or discuss them orally in small groups and/or with the whole class; or do both.

2. Short Reflection Paper (750 words) on your theme

Reflect on what you learned about your theme from answering the item-specific questions in your cluster and Part A opening exercise.

Student Trigger Warning:

Be aware that, in each thematic cluster, there are some or many items that deal with subjects you may find upsetting or disturbing or traumatizing.

These subjects include racism, child labour, intimate partner violence, child sexual abuse, marital and custodial rape, incest, and dowry deaths. The summary of each item indicates the nature of the material. If you intend to read highly sensitive material, prepare yourself beforehand and reach out

for support if needed. If you believe that engaging with certain items or class discussion of them may be traumatizing, choose not to do it. Talk to your instructor about an alternative assignment on South Asian feminism.

Thematic Cluster 1: Work: Wage-earners, Professionals, and Allies

The items deal with different types of workers as well as the organizers, filmmakers, and others who in various ways advocated on their behalf.

1. Brenda Cranney, "Profile of South Asian Community [in Toronto & Canada]," *Diva* Vol. 1, Issue 1 (April 1988): 5-14.

This overview considers the impact of economic disparities on immigrants, immigrant needs and contributions, and other issues.

Questions

1. Identify and comment on three key features of this profile of South Asian communities in late 1980s Toronto and Canada.
2. What challenges do working-class women seeking employment face?
3. Is there an intersectional analysis of South Asian women's situation?

2. Tania Das Gupta, "Working Together: Toronto's South Asian Community," *Diva* Vol.1, Issue 2 (July 1988): 3-8.

A report on community workers supporting women workers in a workplace.

Questions

1. Who are the workers and what are their struggles and demands?
2. Assess the community workers' challenges, approaches & strategies.
3. Did workers and community workers forge bonds of trust? If so, why?

4. What did community workers learn from this action and did the workers get what they wanted?
3. Fauzia Rafiq, "The Position of Her Power," *Diva* Vol. 1, Issue 1 (April 1988): 42-47.

A short story about a bureaucrat processing work permits in Toronto.

Question

1. Who is the narrator of the story and what is the main message?
4. Amita Dhillon, "Female Prostitution: The Reality of a Profession," *Diva* Vol. 1, Issue 3* (Oct-Dec 1988): 25-29.

A personal testimonial from a former sex worker that highlights the detrimental impact it had on the author.

Questions

1. How does Dhillon explain becoming a sex worker?
2. How are the male clients portrayed?
3. In recounting her experiences, Dhillon partly agrees with but mostly takes issue with certain feminist positions on sex work. Discuss.
4. Why is *Diva's* introduction to the testimonial so important?

5. "South Asian Workers Face Down Racism at SuperPlastics" in *A Century of Women and Work*:

<https://riseuparchive.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/ofl-ACenturyofWomenAndWork1900-2000.pdf> p. 50.

AND Sean Fine, "200 join pickets at Super Plastics seeking first contract, higher pay," *Globe and Mail*, Dec 14, 1985, A18 AND Glenn Pattinson, Letter to editor, "Police and strikers," *Globe and Mail*, Nov 29, 1985, A7 (access ProQuest Historical Newspapers online).

A short history of a 1985 strike by South Asian workers followed by a newspaper article and a letter to the editor written at the time of the strike.

Questions

1. When/where/why did the workers go on strike? Did they win or lose?
 2. Why did the creators of the booklet include this strike?
 3. For the article, discuss the union involved, how union leaders explain the strike, the employer's stance, and the tone of the news coverage.
 4. Why did Glenn Pattison write this letter to the newspaper?
6. Saloni Negi, "In the Heat Before the Monsoon," *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 1 (Oct 1991): 61-2.

A Montreal-based author recalls the life of a woman worker in New Delhi.

Questions

1. Why did Negi recall the woman who ironed for her aunt and others?
2. How is the worker portrayed and what is the story's main point?

7. Pervis Rawji, "India Cabaret: Challenging Concepts of Chastity and Morality," *Diva* Vol. 2, Issue 3 (July 1990): 28-9.

A review of filmmaker Mira Nair's documentary on women club dancers in Bombay (Mumbai). Answer the questions before viewing the film for #8.

Questions

1. Based on Rawji's review alone, what do you think this film is about?
2. You can reassess things after viewing the film, but does Rawji's claim that "nobody comes away cold" from Nair's "very powerful movie," and that "in all the squalor ... we are forced to examine our own values and to re-define our concept of beauty, wealth and happiness," raise certain expectations about the documentary?
3. How does Rawji explain that the film challenges concepts of chastity and morality?

Having chosen #7, choose #8 and view Nair's documentary.

8. Mira Nair, *India Cabaret* (1985) [India Cabaret Full Movie 1985 #music #club](#) (youtube, 60 mins).

A 1985 documentary on women club dancers in Bombay (Mumbai) by Mira Nair, whose other films include *Salaam Bombay* & *Mississippi Masala*.

Questions

1. How do the women narrate their story of becoming a club dancer?
2. The dancers pay a cost for defying dominant sexual mores but, like all working women, they labour with dignity and have plans and hopes for the future. Discuss.
3. How would you characterize the main man in the film and his wife?
4. Having viewed the documentary, assess Rawji's points about it "shocking our [who's?] sensibilities" and challenging dominant concepts of chastity and morality.

9. Sumika Perera and Bhadra Wickremasinghe, "2000 Tiles in 8 hours, 5 tiles a minute...", *Diva* Vol. 2, Issue 3 (July 1990): 30-33.

This article, which features an interview with a woman worker employed in a tile factory in Sri Lanka, first appeared in *Kantha Maga: A Journal of the Progressive Women's Front*, no.7, May 1990.

Questions

1. In general terms, who do you think are the women who are trying to interview the female tile factory workers and why?
2. What do you find most striking about the one worker's description of the women's tasks and the working conditions at the tile factory?
3. What about gender differences?
4. Reflect on the worker's tone. Matter of fact? Angry? Resigned? Do you think she might become politicized? If so, why? If not, why not?

10. Meera Dewan, "Children at Work," *Diva*, Vol. 2, Issue 1 (June-Aug 1989): 7-10

Meera Dewan, an important filmmaker who made a documentary on child labour in the glass factories of Firozabad (*Whose Children?* 1986), shares an interview she conducted with a child worker, Ashok, and his father.

Questions

1. Dewan calls Ashok "one of the survivors." Why?
2. Why and how did Ashok find work without telling his father and how would you characterize the father/son relationship?
3. How does Ashok describe work? Friends? Co-workers? His future?
4. Why is child labour an important site of feminist activism?
5. To prepare for a project on the question, how is child labour addressed today as compared to how feminists took up the issue in the 1980s, start with the relevant additional sources below.

11. Judy Whitehead, "Women and the International Division of Labour," *Diva* Vol. 1, Issue 2 (July 1988): 12-15.

This article focuses on the impact of global capitalism on women's work and how racialized immigrant women and women in Asia and Latin America are being drawn into the "new international division of labour."

Questions

1. What types of women's work are being discussed in this 1988 article?
2. The fact that globalization is drawing more women into the paid labour force is not necessarily a positive thing. Why?
3. Discuss the intersectional analysis in this article.
4. Are solutions for improving the situation offered?

12. Vibhuti Patel, "Feminist Street Theatre in India," *Diva* Vol. 2, Issue 1 (June-Aug 1989): 36-40.

This article explores the origins, goals, and practice of feminist street theatre in South Asia. The questions highlight the theme of work.

Questions

1. What is feminist street theatre? When and why did it emerge and how important were working-class women's issues?
2. Who participated, where did the performances take place, and with what results? Answer with a focus on women and work.
3. What are the challenges faced by this form of community-based, alternative, and social-change oriented feminist theatre?

13. Srabani Maitra & Tania Das Gupta, *Journey to Find Myself Again: Experiences of South Asian immigrant women in the Canadian labour market* (2013): [Journey to Find Myself Again](#) (youtube, 30 mins).

A documentary from a somewhat later period (2013) about three well-educated immigrant women navigating the job market and juggling cultural expectations and career aspirations in Canada.

Questions

1. Explain the main message of the film and identify 3-5 major themes.
2. How do the well-educated South Asian immigrant women featured in the documentary handle the challenges of finding work?

3. Does the film offer recommendations? If so, assess them.
4. A project on this theme could compare the past and current work experiences of South Asian immigrant women in Canada (see additional sources below). Can you identify some key differences?

14. Margaretha Jarvinen, "Prostitution and Equality: Looking at the Customer. Copenhagen Research," *Diva* Vol. 2, Issue 1 (June-Aug 1989): 41-44.

The findings of Scandinavian-based research that focused on and challenged popular myths about female sex workers and male customers.

Questions

1. Why do you think this article was included in *Diva*?
2. What assumptions are challenged? Who is not discussed?

A Few Additional Sources for a Potential Theme 1 Project

- [Mira Nair - Wikipedia](#)
- [Mira Nair | Movies, Husband, Son, Age, Biography, & Facts | Britannica](#)
- [Meera Dewan - Wikipedia](#)
- [Meera Dewan: Filmmaker, Documentary filmmaker | Biography, Filmography, Facts, Information, Career, Wiki, Life](#)
- Dewan, *Stained Glass* (The Open Frame, 2012, sequel to *Whose Children?*) available at [STAINED GLASS-20150608 : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

- Md. Abdul Ahad, Y.K. Parry, E. Willis, “The prevalence and impact of maltreatment of child laborers in the context of four South Asian countries: review,” *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 117 (July 2021): 1-12.
- G. Koushik & M. Goswami, “Child Labour in India: Issues, Consequences and Measures,” *Social Vision* 11:1 (2024): 11-21.
- Kumari Jayawardena, “Feminism in Sri Lanka in the Decade, 1975 to 1985,” *Voice of Women* (March 1986): 12-15, 23-24.
- Hema Goonetilaka et al., *Voice of women: A Sri Lankan Journal for Women’s Liberation* (March 1986) at [Voice of women on JSTOR](#)
- Wenona Giles, “The Women’s Movement in Sri Lanka: An Interview with Kumari Jayawardena,” in Giles et al., *Feminists Under Fire: Exchanges Across War Zones* (Toronto: BTL, 2000) at [The Women’s Movement in Sri Lanka: An Interview with Kumari Jayawardena](#)
- Srabani Maitra, “Points of Entry: South Asian Immigrant Women’s Entry into Enclave Entrepreneurship in Toronto,” *South Asian Diaspora* Vol. 5, Issue 1 (2013): 123-37.
- Srabani Maitra, “Are We Not Being Entrepreneurial? Exploring the Home/Work Negotiation of South Asian Immigrant Women Entrepreneurs in Canada,” in Srabani Maitra, *Home-Based Work and Home-Based Workers (1800-2021)* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).
- Tania Das Gupta, [Learning from our history : community development by immigrant women in Ontario, a tool for action : Das Gupta, Tania, 1986- : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive.](#)
- Sheikh Sharmin Shamaly, “The Quest for Autonomy: Transformations of South Asian Women Immigrants in Canada,” (MA thesis: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, 2020).

Thematic Cluster 2: Sexuality and Sexual Health

The items address a range of issues related to sexualities (heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality) and sexual health. Topics include the regulation of girls and women's sexual lives, marital/in-law conflicts, lesbian poetry, HIV/AIDS activism among women, gay pride, and celibacy.

1. *Diva* Editorial Committee, "Dating: The South Asian Experience. An Exploratory Analysis," *Diva* Vol. 1, Issue 3* (Oct-Dec 1988): 3-11.

The editorial committee addresses the taboo of women dating in the South Asian immigrant community and the results of a questionnaire.

Questions

1. Why did *Diva* carry out this questionnaire on South Asian women's situation with respect to Canada's dating game culture?
2. Who took the questionnaire and did the answers offer insights into heterosexuality?
3. What is meant by a "Catch-22" situation?
4. How did *Diva* interpret the findings and were proposals offered?

2. Kishwar Naheed, "Of Lesbianism" (transl. Saheban~), *Diva* Vol. 1, Issue 2 (July 1988): 24-29.

An article taken from poet/writer Naheed's book on the Nairobi Conference on Women that recounts the author's observations of and interactions with lesbian delegates at the conference.

Questions

1. How does *Diva* introduce Naheed's recent endorsement of lesbian sexual practice as a woman's right and why do they think it may contribute towards improving the lives of lesbians in Pakistan?
2. Why does Naheed, a self-identified heterosexual feminist focused on scrutinizing male superiority and long disinterested in close female relationships, decide to take lesbianism more seriously?
3. Characterize Naheed's interactions with the two lesbian delegates and how it led her to question her misconceptions?
4. What did you learn about the author's heterosexuality?

The Nairobi Conference took place in 1985.

3. Bhooma Bhayana, "Children: A Female Physician's Perspective" column, *Diva* Vol. 2, Issue 1 (June-Aug 1989): 13-15.

Bhayana addresses the challenges facing South Asian children, particularly girls, in immigrant families, and the dilemma of young South Asian and South-East Asian women over whether, or not, to become sexually active.

Questions

1. Why is Dr. Bhayana concerned about the mental, emotional, and sexual health of young South Asian and South-East Asian women?
 2. Why the focus on "the adolescent?" And is heterosexuality assumed?
 3. Are possible solutions offered?
4. Sharifa Sharif, "Alien Passenger," *Diva* Vol. 3 Issue 1 (Oct 1991): 64.

A subway ride leads the protagonist in this poem to reflect on her sexuality.

Questions

1. What prompts the self-named “muslim alien woman” of the poem to express her emotions about sex and what are those emotions?
2. How do you interpret the poem?

5. Aruna Papp, “To Me a Daughter was Born,” *Diva* Vol. 1, Issue 2 (July 1988): 46-50.

A short story in which the female protagonist, who is opposed to her arranged marriage, becomes pregnant and, ultimately, defiant.

1. What does the female protagonist in the story do and why?
2. What do we learn about the cultural values and norms expressed through the character’s experiences and view of what is happening?
3. Does she want the child, and what happens?

6. Saadat Hasan Manto, "License," *Diva* Vol. 1, Issue 2 (July 1988): 35-40.

A short story about a heterosexual couple who marry and the impact of the husband’s imprisonment and death on the wife/widow. The correct spelling is Saadat Hasan Manto.

Questions

1. Who is Manto and why did *Diva* publish this short story?
2. Who are the main characters and what happens to them?
3. How does the woman deal with the challenges she faces and how do others view and treat her?
4. What is the main lesson(s) of the story?

7. S. V. Whittaker, "First Time," *Diva* Vol. 1, Issue 3* (Oct-Dec 1988):19.

A poem about a woman's first painful and loveless experience of sexual intercourse with a man. Scroll down to page 19.

Questions

1. Who is the narrator and what emotions are expressed?
2. What is meant by "a violation of love"?

8. Suniti Namjoshi and Gill Hanscombe, "Poems/Seaton, England," *Diva* Vol. 1, Issue 3* (Oct-Dec 1988): 53-60.

Diva introduces these poems as "a dialogue between two women who write to, for and with each other, as friends, poets, lesbians and lovers" (p. 53).



1. What insights does the poetry offer into the authors' relationship?
2. What does the poem called "In this kind country" (pp. 53-55) refer to? It contains a certain irony.
3. "When we make love you and I / are both sacred and secular. / The goddess's limbs/ begin to move. / Balanced underfoot / the world spins." Discuss this stanza from *In that Particular Temple* (p. 58). Or choose another striking stanza to comment on.

9. Ismat Chughtai, "The Quilt" (transl. Syeda Hameed), *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 2 (March 1992): 79-85.

The female narrator in this short story recounts a girlhood memory of visiting an aunt neglected by a husband who prefers the company of young male students and discovering the aunt's relationship with her female maid. The correct spelling is Ismat Chughtai. *Diva* reprinted "The Quilt" in memory of Chughtai, who had succeeded in defending herself at an obscenity trial concerning the story (p. 7 this issue).

Questions

1. Chughtai's short story contains cues that speak to the theme of sexuality. Identify some cues and the sexualities they reference.
2. Is it an indictment of how patriarchy and marriage repress sexuality?
3. A project on Chughtai (or another South Asian writer) could consider the following: The internet made more accessible the work of international writers of stature who, like Chughtai, were well respected but not well known in the west. In the context of the pre-digital era, discuss the value of *Diva* bringing such writers to the attention of western readers.

10. Bhooma Bhayana, "Sexual Normality–Abnormality: A Female Physician's Perspective," *Diva* Vol. 1, Issue 3* (Oct-Dec 1988):16-19.

Columnist Dr. Bhayana talks about women in South Asian marriages, including in Canada, and touches on the Hudood Ordinances in Pakistan.

Questions

1. What is meant by women using sex to barter in marriage?

2. Why invoke the Hudood Ordinances to talk about Canada?
3. Are there recommendations? What about Take Back the Night?

11. Leela Acharya and Amina Sherazee, “Editorial: On Behalf of Diva” (pp. 5-6) AND “AIDS/HIV: Our Beliefs and Myths: A Survey of Women of South Asian Origin” (pp. 7-12), *Divya* Vol. 3, Issue 3 (Sept-Dec 1992).

The editors of this theme issue on HIV/AIDS carried out a survey with South Asian women in two Canadian cities to determine what they did and did not know about HIV and AIDS – and to debunk myths with reality.

Questions

1. Who took the *Divya* survey and what did the responses reveal about the women’s grasp of HIV/AIDS and their sexual health? Were there intergenerational differences?
2. What were the most common misconceptions regarding practicing safe sex and avoiding infection? And the corrections?
3. What main message is being delivered regarding types of activities versus sexual preference or self-identification?

12. Annie Aman, “Living with HIV,” *Divya* Vol. 3, Issue 3 (Sept-Dec 1992):13-17.

A woman’s testimonial about living with HIV and becoming an activist.

Questions

1. Does Aman's initial denial about being a HIV positive woman challenge or confirm the concerns raised by South Asian feminists like the *Diva* collective about women in their diasporic communities?
2. What does Aman stress with respect to living with HIV and how would you characterize her main message and her activism?
3. What support services exist for women living with HIV and AIDS?

13. Leela Acharya, "Community Response to AIDS in England: Interview with Aisha Khan," *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 3 (Sept-Dec 1992): 19-26.

This early 1990s interview with a London-based AIDS educator described as "one of the few South Asian women working with this issue in our communities" addresses HIV/AIDs and a range of issues related to sexual health, heterosexuality, homosexuality, and front-line activism.

Questions

1. Khan addresses the complex and sensitive issue of getting the women she serves to test for HIV. Explain.
2. Where can South Asians in early 1990s London, UK, particularly the women, go for AIDS-related information and services?
3. How does Khan facilitate conversations about the links between HIV infection, AIDS, and sexual health? In mother-daughter workshops?
4. Sexual health "isn't just about sex." Explain.
5. Why does Khan's AIDs activism include tackling homophobia and married men's denial of bisexuality in the South Asian communities?

14. Gita Saxena, "AIDS in India," *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 3 (Sept-Dec '92):39-42.

Filmmaker Saxena's transcript from a pilot videotape of interviews taken for a project on Aids in India features a representative of the Indian Council of Medical Research and three activists with the AIDS Anti-Discrimination Movement known as ABVA (AIDS BHEDBHAV VIRODHI ANDOLAN).

Questions

1. What are the main points of divergence between Dr. Tripathy and the AIDS activists?
2. What do the AIDS activists say about Dr. Tripathy's claims that there isn't much homosexuality in India, and that, since the first evidence of HIV in the mid-1980s, state-assisted scientists have been diligently screening "high risk subjects, particularly prostitutes and people with sexually transmitted diseases," as well as blood donors?
3. What are the grassroots women's groups working in Delhi's redlight area doing to try to assist and empower marginalized sex workers?
4. The AIDS activists accuse the state of scapegoating sex workers and violating their rights (how?) through false scientific claims that spread dangerous misinformation about HIV/AIDS. Explain.

15. Kaushalya Bannerji, “Lusting for Life: A Few Thoughts About Aids,” *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 3 (Sept-Dec 1992): 31-33.

In this 1992 article, a Toronto-based lesbian who was active in the Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention reflects on the initial sense of security that certain groups felt with respect to HIV.

Questions

1. Bannerji invokes the concept of “good girls” and “good community” to help explain why lesbians and people of South Asian origins may have initially found it difficult to acknowledge their vulnerability with respect to HIV transmission. Discuss.
2. Identify the focus of the Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention.
3. How do you interpret the call for “A Morality which lusts for life.”?

16. Lipika Bannerjee & Mariam Khan Durrani (photos), “Proud and Visible: Celebrating Ourselves. People of Colour Float in Lesbian and Gay Pride Day Parade, Toronto, June 28, 1992, *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 3 (Sept-Dec 1992): 54-5 AND “The First Ever Anthology of Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals of South Asian Origin, *Diva* Vol. 4, Issue 1 (June-Aug 1993): 94-95.

A report with photos on the 1992 people of colour pride float in Toronto and excerpts from Rakesh Ratti ed., *A Lotus of Another Color: An Unfolding of the South Asian Gay and Lesbian Experience*, 1993.

Questions

1. How does Lipika Bannerjee explain the formation of the Proud and Visible Coalition and its choice of theme (what was it?) for its banner for the 1992 Lesbian & Gay Pride Parade in Toronto?
2. Interpret Durrani's photographs of the making of the float.
3. Bannerjee also notes a few "disappointing" outcomes. What were they and what strategies are proposed for dealing with them?
4. If you wish to read more of, and possibly prepare a project on, *A Lotus of Another Color*, access the book (see below).

17. Sheila James, "From Promiscuity to Celibacy," *Diva*, Vol. 3, Issue 4 (Jan-Mar 1993): 27-29.

Creative writing that uses humour to address sexuality, desire, and identity.

Questions

1. How does James explore the journey from promiscuity to celibacy?
2. How does James reflect on the process of trying to redefine a sense of self outside of romantic and physical validation?
3. Discuss the concept of self-imposed celibacy as empowering.
4. Does James effectively use humour to criticize sexual norms?

A Few Additional Sources for a Potential Theme 2 Project

- [Kishwar Naheed - Wikipedia](#)
- Mahwash Shoaib, "Vocabulary of Resistance: A Conversation with Kishwar Naheed," *Pakistaniaat: Journal of Pakistan Studies*, 1:2 (2009): 172-79 [291838963.pdf](#)
- Kishwar Naheed, *A Bad Woman's Story* (transl. D. Soomro) (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- [Suniti Namjoshi - Wikipedia](#)
- Suniti Namjoshi, *Because of India: Selected Poems and Fables* (London: Onlywomen Press, 1989) available at [Because of India: selected poems and fables: Namjoshi, Suniti: Free Download, Borrow, Streaming : Internet Archive](#)
- Namjoshi & Hanscombe, *Flesh and Paper* (Richmond: Jezebel Tapes and Books & Charlottetown: Ragweed Press, 1986).
- Pratibha Parmar, film, *Flesh and Paper* (England, 1990, 26 mins).
- [Ismat Chughtai - Wikipedia](#)
- Ismat Chughtai, *The Quilt and Other Stories* (Kali for Women, 1990, transl. Syeda Hameed) at [A Chughtai Collection The Quilt And Other Stories The Heart Breaks Free The Wild One : Chughitat Ismat : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#) (Women Unlimited, 2004). The correct spelling is Chughtai.
- Rakesh Ratti ed., *A Lotus of Another Color: An Unfolding of the South Asian Gay and Lesbian Experience* available at [A Lotus of another color : an unfolding of the South Asian gay and lesbian experience : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#) (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1993).

Thematic Cluster 3: Sexual Violence against Girls and Women

The items deal with difficult issues such as wife assault, child abuse, incest, and the treatment of rape cases.

1. Reeta Kohli, "Living on the Edge," *Diva* Vol. 1, Issue 4 (Mar-May 1989): 5-12.

A shelter movement activist addresses the historical persistence of intimate partner violence and the failure to eradicate it.

Questions

1. Kohli writes that "wife battering has been rampant globally since the history of Man." Discuss.
2. Kohli says the women's movement exposed wife assault but that the patriarchy has found ways to minimize the abuse. How so?
3. What light does this article shed on the lives of the victims of wife assault in South Asian immigrant communities in Toronto?

2. Fauzia Rafiq, *The Memory of an Unpaid Debt* (transl. Corey Levine), *Diva* Vol. 1, Issue 3* (Oct.-Dec.1988): 47-52.

A haunting short story about a woman whose husband is a good provider but uncaring lover that also addresses incest.

Questions

1. How does Rafiq draw you, the reader, into Dano's story?
2. How does Rafiq portray the intergenerational relations between the different members of this extended family?
3. How do you interpret the title?

3. Leela Acharya, “On Behalf of the Editorial Collective, *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 2 (March 1992) (Issue on sexual assault, incest, and rape): 5-7.

The introduction addresses the reasons for and the impact on the editorial collective of producing a theme issue on sexual assault, incest, and rape.

Questions

1. How does Acharya explain the impact that putting together this important theme issue had on the *Diva* editorial collective?
2. Discuss the insight that sexual violence against women, girls, and boys is not private or personal but political.
3. How does Acharya compare the struggles of South Asian feminists against patriarchal violence in Canada and those in South Asia?

4. Leela Acharya, “Any Evidence?” *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 2 (March 1992): 9-11.

A personal and difficult-to-read testimonial of child abuse and rape.

Question

1. Leela Acharya’s testimonial is an act of tremendous courage. What did this story tell you about who, when, and where perpetrators commit sexual violence and how survivors struggle to survive it?

5. Neesha Sukhi Virk Dosanjh, “I Am Five Years Old,” *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 2 (March 1992): 12-14.

A personal and difficult-to-read testimonial of child abuse.

1. Neesha Sukhi Virk Dosanjh's testimonial is an act of immense courage. Discuss who, when, and where perpetrators commit sexual violence and how survivors struggle to survive it?
2. How do you interpret the commentary on the mother?

6. Rubya Mehdi, "Rape and Consensual Sex without Marriage: Are these the Same?" *Diva* Vol. 1, Issue 1 (April 1988): 33-35.

A 1988 essay on the Hudood Ordinances—described as repressive patriarchal laws regulating sexual relations—and the consequences for victims of rape in Pakistan. It provides an update on the Offense of Zina (ie., the enforcement of the Hudood Ordinances declared under the Martial Law regime in Pakistan in 1979 as part of the "islamization" of the legal system) and explains how the law applies to consensual sex without marriage and the treatment of rape cases.

Question

1. Why do you think this topic is covered in the very first issue of *Diva*?
2. What is Mehdi's expertise and perspective?
3. A troubling issue identified is that a woman who goes to court for being raped may end up being convicted of consensual sex without marriage, and therefore punished, while the accused rapist is acquitted on the benefit of the doubt. How could this happen?
4. How did women's organizations in Pakistan oppose these "reforms"?

7. Rubya Mehdi, "The Offense of Rape in the Islamic Law of Pakistan," *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 2 (March 1992): 36-43.

This reprinted article from 1990 explains the 1979 changes in the rape law in Pakistan and then provides an update on the situation.

Questions

1. In explaining the changes in the rape law introduced in Pakistan in 1979, Mehdi compares how the Islamic regime in Pakistan and most western countries treat “fornication” and adultery. What are the differences? And what are the consequences?
2. On what grounds have feminists called the 1979 reforms a misinterpretation of the Quran?
3. How were feminists in Pakistan protesting these changes?

8. Kris, “Obituary,” *Diva* Vol. 1, Issue 3* (Oct-Dec 1988): 30-33.

Excerpts from an obituary written by a poet and radio host.

Question

1. Who is Kris and why is Kris happy that Gen. Z. Haq died?

9. Annalise Kongstad, “Why do Men Rape Women?” *Diva* Vol. 1, Issue 3* (Oct-Dec 1988): 12-15.

A report on rape by a Danish criminologist based in Copenhagen.

Questions

1. Why did *Diva* include this report and what are the findings?
2. Why does Kongstad criticize feminist Susan Brownmiller?
3. How is the relationship between patriarchy and rape addressed?

10. "Facts to Consider," Ontario Women's Directorate: Sexual Assault of Women," *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 2 (March 1992): 63-64, 71-72.

A report on the 1983 survey by the Canadian Human Rights Commission on unwanted sexual attention and sexual harassment.

Questions

1. What is the OWD? And the CHRC?
2. What were the main findings of this survey?
3. Are there recommendations? Resources?

11. "Project Children in Crisis, Research/Islamabad, Pakistan," *Diva* Vol. 2, Issue 1 (June-Aug 1989): 11-12.

A report on an initiative of the group Voice Against Torture.

Questions

1. Who is Voice Against Torture and what kind of work do they do?
2. What is the initiative? The scale?
3. How do children become victims of different types of torture?
4. Discuss the impact on children of experiencing torture or witnessing torture or living with the consequences of the torture of loved ones.

12. “A Conversation with Nadene Elliott from the Toronto Rape Crisis Centre,” *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 2 (March 1992): 21-26.

This conversation addresses women’s experiences of sexual assault and rape trials and organizing support for the victims.

Questions

1. How is the situation with respect to the character and outcome of rape cases sized up in this 1992 interview?
2. Is there a relationship between race and the reporting of rape? And the provision of support services for victims of rape?
3. What do staff and counsellors at the Rape Crisis Centre do and why?
4. Note the exchange over the Supreme Court of Canada then having recently struck down the rape shield law, but also consider the longer history: <https://nawl.ca/rape-shield-provisions-upheld/> AND <https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/sexual-assault>

13. Lina Gonsalves, “Laws on Rape,” *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 2 (Mar 1992): 33-5.

On the Mathura case of custodial rape in India that prompted a large-scale feminist mobilization and eventually led to some reforms in the rape law.

Questions

1. Who was Mathura, what happened to her, and how did she respond?
2. The case passed through all three levels of India’s judicial system – sessions court, high court, Supreme court – with what outcomes?
3. Why and how did feminists and others in India respond to the case?

14. Nishtha Shanti, *Feminism in India*, [The Mathura Rape Case Of 1972: A Watershed Moment In India's Rape Laws](#) (7-min. read) AND [The Mathura](#)

Rape Case Of 1972: A Watershed Moment In India's Rape Laws (4-min. animation video) (Sept 2, 2021).

These overviews were produced decades after the Mathura case (1972-79) but they use historical photographs as well as animation to tell the history.

Questions

1. Who had Mathura summoned to the police station? And who was Mathura's lawyer who fought the case from 1972 to 1979?
2. On what grounds did the Supreme Court issue a not guilty verdict?
3. Shanti notes that "this case is touted to be one of the cornerstones of a national feminist movement in India." Discuss.
4. The case led to what kinds of reforms in the rape law in India? To prepare for a project that explores Shanti's question, "How far have we really come?" begin with the additional sources below.
5. The historical photographs include images of women at a large demonstration, a rally, a conference, and one of Mathura accompanied by a female activist. How might you interpret them?

On a FIR, [\(5\) Understanding FIR \(First Information Report\) || Human Rights || Factly - YouTube](#) (3 mins).

15. "[The 2nd] National Gathering of Women of South Asian Origin Against Sexual Violence and Abuse" (pp. 96-97) and "Feedback" (pp. 121-25), *Diva* Vol. 4, Issue 1 (June-Aug 1993).

A report on a three-day conference to address sexual violence and abuse.

Questions

1. Who came, what did they focus on, and what objectives were forged?

2. Read the feedback and identify the main issues the writers raised.
3. Did any writers refer to tensions and, if so, what were they?
4. One writer insightfully notes, “our cultures get attacked as the problem for violence, rather than patriarchal thinking.” Discuss.

A Few Additional Sources for a Potential Theme 3 Project

- Rubya Mehdi, *The Islamization of the Law in Pakistan* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1994).
- Fauzia Rafiq, *Aurat Durbar, The Court of Women: Writings by Women of South Asian Origin* (Toronto: Sumach Press, 1995).
- Writing for Social Change: Betsy Warland & Fauzia Rafiq (Susan Crean, 2012).
- The Gathering against sexual violence - York University (Conference Proceedings, ed. by Fauzia Rafiq, Toronto 1995).
- The Mathura Rape Case: A Tragic Catalyst For Rape Law Reform In India » Lawful Legal Law Journal, by Seniorita Shelton, July 28, 2025.
- Navin Kumar, “Shaping Justice: The Legacy of Mathura Rape Case on Indian Legal System” in *GLS Law Journal* 7:1 (2025): 20-28: [Shaping Justice: The Legacy of Mathura Rape Case on Indian Legal System | GLS Law Journal](#)

Thematic Cluster 4: Feminist Organizing and Actions

The recorded actions include fact sheets, research, street theatre, mobilizing resources, rallies, and political campaigns. The issues include rape, dowry deaths, female infanticide, child torture, and police violence.

1. Brenda Cranney, “Son Preference in India [with poem],” *Diva* Vol. 1, Issue 3* (Oct-Dec 1988): 35-46.

This 1988 article examines the politics of reproduction and the repression particularly of rural women.

Questions

1. Who is Cranney and what does she identify as the underlying source(s) of women's repression in India?
2. Identify examples of repression. Then choose one and elaborate.
3. What about differences between the North and South?
4. Why begin with a protest poem by Keshav Meshram, an important male Dalit poet and novelist?

2. Sunera Thobani, "News in Black in White," *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 1 (October 1991): 57-60.

The essay addresses racism, particularly in newspaper reporting.

Questions

1. Why is locating and redressing racist bias in newspapers important?
2. What is the difference between interpersonal and institutionalized racism? Does Thobani talk about white supremacy and, if so, how?
3. What writing trends are problematic for immigrant women from non-North American but particularly non-western backgrounds?
4. Can newspaper reporting influence views? Explain for Canada.

3. Jyotsna Vaid, "Seeking a Voice – South Asian Women's Groups in North America," *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 1 (Oct 1991): 9-18.

This 1989 article on South Asian women's groups in North America based on research done in 1985-87 is reprinted in a theme issue on Resources.

1. Briefly describe the focus and goals of the various women's groups.
2. Identify the explicitly feminist groups and their respective agendas.
3. What is meant by the "struggle vs service" debate?
4. Compare the goals and strategies of ANAMIKA and SAWCC.

4. Tania Das Gupta, "Working Together: Toronto's South Asian Community," *Diva* Vol. 1, Issue 2 (July 1988): 3-8.

A report on community workers supporting women workers in a workplace.

Questions

1. Who are the workers and what are their struggles and demands?
2. Assess the community workers' challenges, approaches & strategies.
3. Did workers and community workers forge bonds of trust? If so, why?
4. What did community workers learn from this action and did the workers get what they wanted?

5. Holly A. Handspiker, "The Projected Image: Fact Sheet on Women's Fight Against Canadian Media," *Diva* Vol. 1, Issue 3* (Oct-Dec 1988): 20-4.

On fact sheets as an important tool of feminist research and activism.

1. What is the National Action Committee on the Status of Women and how did NAC's activism lead to the formation of Media Watch?
2. Who did they lobby and why, and was it successful?

6. Wei Feng, "Police Violence & Racism (Pt 1)," *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 1 (Oct 1991): 52-56.

The essay looks at why Asian and other feminist activists have organized to deal with police and related racism and violence in Toronto and Canada.

Questions

1. What led feminists to become involved in this type of activism?
2. Why is naming the victims and how they died so important? Name the victims described in this essay.
3. What recommendations did Wei Feng propose?

7. Meera Dewan, "Children at Work," *Diva*, Vol. 2, Issue 1 (June-Aug 1989): 7-10.

Meera Dewan, an important filmmaker who made a documentary on child labour in the glass factories of Firozabad (*Whose Children?*, 1986) shares an interview she conducted with a child worker, Ashok, and his father.

Questions

1. Dewan calls Ashok "one of the survivors." Why?
2. Why and how did Ashok find work without telling his father and how would you characterize the father/son relationship?
3. How does Ashok describe work? Friends? Co-workers? His future?
4. Why is child labour an important site of feminist activism?
5. To prepare for a project on the question, how is child labour addressed today as compared to how feminists took up the issue in the 1980s, start with the relevant additional sources below.

8. "Project Children in Crisis, Research/Islamabad, Pakistan," *Diva* Vol. 2, Issue 1 (June-Aug 1989): 11-12.

A report on an initiative of the group Voice Against Torture.

Questions

1. Who is Voice Against Torture and what kind of work do they do?
2. What is the initiative? The scale?
3. How do children become victims of different types of torture?
4. Discuss the impact on children of experiencing torture or witnessing or living with the consequences of the torture of loved ones.

9. Vibhuti Patel, "Feminist Theatre in India," *Diva* Vol. 2, Issue 1 (June-August 1989): 36-40 AND Fauzia Rafiq, "Feminist Theatre at First Canada-wide Conference on South Asian Women, in *The Good, the Bad & the Ugly* (column), *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 1 (Oct 1991): 5.

Patel discusses feminist street theatre in South Asia. Rafiq notes a play (by Nilambri Ghai) performed by the theatre group of the South Asian Women's Community Centre (SAWCC) in Toronto during a landmark conference.

Questions

1. When and why did feminist street theatre emerge? What makes it alternative (to what?) and a form of protest theatre?
2. Who, where, and what is performed and with what results?
3. Patel shows that feminist street theatre tackles many taboo issues but also expresses concerns about the challenges being faced by this social-change oriented theatre. What are they?

4. How does Rafiq describe Nilambri Ghai's "Devi-Dass" ("The Goddess and the Slave") and the performance? (To learn more about Montreal-based Ghai, begin with the additional sources.)

10. Tania Das Gupta, "Autonomous Women's Groups in India: Impressions from a Study Tour," *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 1 (Oct 1991): 35-42.

A report on a research trip to cities in India to meet with members of various autonomous women's groups and learn about their activism.

Questions

1. What are the major sites of mobilization described?
2. What were the different strategies adopted?
3. Explain "direct action" using the example of the "train campaign."
4. Were there longer-term goals?

11. Fauzia Rafiq, "Elite Group of Muslims Propose Muslim Personal Law in Canada" in *The Good, the Bad & the Ugly* column under *The Bad*, *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 1 (Oct 1991): 7.

A statement opposing the adoption of "Muslim Personal Law" in Canada.

Questions

1. Why did *Diva* oppose the adoption of the Muslim Personal Law regime in Canada?
2. What is meant by "wife abuse/assault becomes domestic feuds"?
3. Comment on the claim that the proposal mocks the concept of multiculturalism and violates the Human Rights Charter.

12. "A Conversation with Nadene Elliott from the Toronto Rape Crisis Centre," *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 2 (March 1992): 21-26.

This conversation addresses women's experiences of sexual assault and rape trials and organizing support for the victims.

Questions

1. How is the situation with respect to the character and outcome of rape cases sized up in this 1992 interview?
2. Is there a relationship between race and the reporting of rape? And with respect to the provision of services for victims of rape?
3. What do staff and counsellors at the Rape Crisis Centre do and why?
4. Note the exchange over the Supreme Court of Canada then having recently struck down the rape shield law, but also consider the longer history: <https://nawl.ca/rape-shield-provisions-upheld/> AND <https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/sexual-assault>

13. Leela Acharya, "Community Response to AIDS in England: Interview with Aisha Khan," *Diva* Vol., 3, Issue 3 (Sept-Dec 1992): 19-26.

This early 1990s interview with a London-based AIDS educator described as "one of the few South Asian women working with this issue in our communities" addresses HIV/AIDS and a wide range of issues related to sexual health, heterosexuality, homosexuality, and front-line activism.

Questions

1. Khan addresses the complex and sensitive issue of getting the women she serves to test for HIV. Explain.

2. Where can South Asians in early 1990s London, UK, and particularly the women, go for AIDS-related information and services?
3. How does Khan facilitate conversations about the links between HIV infection, AIDS, and sexual health? In mother-daughter workshops?
4. Sexual health “isn’t just about sex.” Explain.
5. Why does Khan’s AIDS activism include tackling homophobia and married men’s denial of bisexuality in the South Asian communities?

14. Georgie Wemyss, “Women Against Religious Fundamentalism: WAF in London,” *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 4 (Jan-Mar 1993): 70-73.

An article on the rise of religious fundamentalism and its impact on women’s rights in Britain and the origins and activities of WAF.

Questions

1. Identify WAF and explain its origins and activities.
2. According to Wemyss, how do self-identified liberal multicultural countries end up supporting patriarchal structures enforced by fundamentalist beliefs?
3. What was WAF’s Rabia Janjua campaign?

15. Lina Gonsalves, “Laws on Rape,” *Diva* Vol. 3, Issue 2 (Mar 1992): 33-5.

On the Mathura case of custodial rape in India that prompted a large-scale feminist mobilization and eventually led to some reforms in the rape law.

Questions

1. Who was Mathura, what happened to her, and how did she respond?
2. The case passed through all three levels of India’s judicial system – sessions court, high court, Supreme court – with what outcomes?

3. Why and how did feminists and others in India respond to the case?

16. Nishtha Shanti, Feminism in India, [The Mathura Rape Case Of 1972: A Watershed Moment In India's Rape Laws](#) (7-min. read) AND [The Mathura Rape Case Of 1972: A Watershed Moment In India's Rape Laws](#) (4-min. animation video) (Sept 2, 2021).

These overviews were produced decades after the Mathura case (1972-79) but use historical photographs as well as animation to tell the history.

Questions

1. Who had Mathura summoned to the police station? And who was Mathura's lawyer who fought the case from 1972 to 1979?
2. On what grounds did the Supreme Court issue a not guilty verdict?
3. Shanti notes that "this case is touted to be one of the cornerstones in the development of a national feminist movement in India." Discuss.
4. The case led to what kinds of reforms in the rape law in India? To prepare for a project that explores Shanti's question, "How far have we really come?" begin with the additional sources below.
5. The historical photographs include images of women at a large demonstration, a rally, a conference, and one of Mathura accompanied by a female activist. How might you interpret them?

On a FIR, [\(5\) Understanding FIR \(First Information Report\) || Human Rights || Factly - YouTube](#) (3 mins).

17. “[The 2nd] National Gathering of Women of South Asian Origin Against Sexual Violence and Abuse” (pp. 96-7) and “Feedback” (pp. 121-25), *Diva* Vol. 4, Issue 1 (June-Aug 1993).

A report on a three-day conference to address sexual violence and abuse.

Questions

1. Who came, what did they focus on, and what objectives were forged?
2. Read the feedback and identify the main issues the writers raised.
3. Did any writers refer to tensions and, if so, what were they?
4. One writer insightfully notes, “our cultures get attacked as the problem for violence, rather than patriarchal thinking.” Discuss.

A Few Additional Sources for a Potential Theme 4 Project

To delve deeper into *Diva*, consider following a recurring column:

- Fauzia Rafiq, *The Good, the Bad & the Ugly*.
- Bhooma Bhayana, *A Female Physician’s Perspective*.

Other Sources:

- No Longer Silent - NFB Collection (1986, 56 mins. documentary, dir. Laurette Deschamps). An NFB acquisition.
- Meera Dewan, see Additional Sources for Theme 1 Work.
- On child labour today, see Additional Sources for Theme 1 Work.
- (5) The history of Feminist Theatre in India | Feminism In India - YouTube - YouTube (script/narration Anushka Prasad, Dec 4, 2021).
- Praggnaparamita Biswas, Street-Theatre And Indian Feminist Theatre - The Theatre Times (Feb 2019; *Muse India*, Mar-Apr 2018).
- Aishwarya Javalkar, How Feminist Theatre Emerged in India | Feminism In India (Aug 30, 2017, 6-min. read).

- Nilambri Ghai, "Poems," *Diva* Vol. 1, Issue 2 (July 1988): 57-60.
- Nilambri Ghai [From Johanne to Janaki: Bringing Vikings to Varanasi](#), (2020) summary of book, *India@logs* Vol. 2, 2015, 114-118.
- Pragna Patel, "Alert for Action: *Women Living under Muslim Laws Dossiers 1-6*, *Feminist Review* 37 (Spring 1991): 95-102 (WAF & Rabia Janjua campaign).
- Tania Das Gupta, [Learning from our history : community development by immigrant women in Ontario, a tool for action : Das Gupta, Tania, 1986- : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive.](#)
- Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).
- Himani Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism, and Gender* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2000).
- On the Mathura Case, see Additional Sources for Theme 3, including: Navin Kumar, "Shaping Justice: The Legacy of Mathura Rape Case on Indian Legal System," in *GLS Law Journal* 7:1 (2025): 20-28: [Shaping Justice: The Legacy of Mathura Rape Case on Indian Legal System | GLS Law Journal](#)

Part C: Complete a project related to your theme

To complete an individual or group project, or to develop your own more in-depth senior project, draw on the materials and learnings from completing Parts A and B and conduct some additional research. Consult your instructor about all requirements for your project. Prepare for the meeting by consulting the additional sources listed at the end of your thematic

cluster and the Project Details and Resources listed below. Then, if required, do some more selective research on the past and/or present.

Project Options:

1. Write a Biographical entry (or two entries)
2. Create/edit a Wiki entry or participate in a Group Wiki Edit-a-thon
3. Create a Heritage Plaque for a person, group, event, or site
4. Design a walking/driving tour of sites relevant to your theme
5. Design a mural related to your theme
6. Create a short podcast
7. Conduct an interview

The focus and content of your project will partly depend on your choice of project, but, generally, you may focus on individual(s), groups, agencies, organizations, laws, campaigns, creative writing, physical sites etc.

Possible examples: an activist involved in political, legal, union or health activism; a poet, filmmaker or short story writer; a case that provoked public protest; someone willing to discuss work, family or other experiences; a women's community centre; sites of political rallies; and pride parades.

Project Details and Resources

The instructions include suggestions. Consult the on-line resources. Some resources apply to more than one project. If you have trouble accessing the resources, tell your instructor. Work out project details with your instructor.

1. Biographical Entry for 1 or 2 people

Write an entry on a relevant historical figure(s) that could appear in a dictionary or encyclopedia. The two entries can vary in length.

Suggested length: total 2000 words with a few images with captions.

Here, “historical” means mainly someone active in the 1980s and 1990s. A focus on the early 2000s is also fine. So is choosing to draw comparisons between the 1980s-1990s period and the more recent past or the present.

Use but do not limit the profile to information contained in the historical materials you have already examined. Consult some additional sources.

Browse *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* and consult a few examples:

- [Home – Dictionary of Canadian Biography](#)
- [Women in the DCB/DBC – Dictionary of Canadian Biography](#)
- [KAUR, HARNAM – Dictionary of Canadian Biography](#)
- [STATIA – Dictionary of Canadian Biography](#)
- [JOHNSON, EMILY PAULINE – Dictionary of Canadian Biography](#)

Browse *The Canadian Encyclopedia* and consult a few examples:

- [Home | The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)
- [People | The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)
- [30 Notable Women’s Rights Activists in Canada | The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)
- [Rosemary Brown | The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)
- [Irshad Manji Challenges Islam | The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

These guides assume a bigger project but offer helpful advice:

- [How to Write a Biography: A Step-by-Step Guide](#)
- [How to Write a Biography in 8 Steps \(The Non-Boring Way!\)](#)

- How to write a biographical entyr - Google Search (misspelt “entyr” is “correct”)

2. A Wikipedia entry or edit or a Group Wiki Edit-a-thon

Suggested Length: 1500-2000 words, with some images with captions.

An individual project to create or edit a wiki entry on a subject or a group project to participate in a wiki edit-a-thon.

To edit an existing entry, do not simply add a few additional facts or images, but make a substantive contribution.

Wikipedia is a free encyclopedia so consult the resources for project 1 for writing an entry for an encyclopedia or dictionary of biography.

Before you start, consult Wikipedia’s policies and guidelines:

- Wikipedia:List of policies and guidelines - Wikipedia

For instructions tailored to completing this assignment, go to:

- <https://riseupfeministarchive.ca/wp-content/uploads/AA-Wikipedia-Instructions-Diva-Assignment.pdf>

3. Heritage Plaque for a person, group, event, item, or site

Make a case for and create your own plaque for a relevant subject.

Suggested Length: 1500-2000 words with images (with captions) in a format of your choice (e.g., power point, website). Design your own plaque.

The citation on a historical plaque may be brief (e.g. 300 words) but a successful application to a heritage group to erect one to a subject requires an effective pitch. To make your case, provide a short biography/history of your subject. Explain why the subject is worthy of public commemoration.

To create your own plaque in honour of your subject, choose an appropriate image and include a two-paragraph citation (300-400 words).

Whatever your choice of subject, it would be useful to consult some of the information and resources provided for projects 1 & 2.

Browse these resources and consult examples of existing plaques as well as application/nomination requirements:

Parks Canada and Historic Sites & Monuments Board of Canada:

- [Women's history in Canada](#)
- [Submit a nomination - National historic designations](#)
- [Harriet Tubman \(circa 1822-1913\) National Historic Person](#)
- [Kathleen 'Kay' Livingstone National Historic Person \(1918-1975\)](#)

Heritage Toronto plaques and applying for one:

- [Plaques & Historical Plaque Application - Heritage Toronto](#)
- [City Park: Mid-Century 2SLGBTQ+ Heritage – Heritage Toronto](#)

BC Labour Heritage Centre's Remembering Working People Project:

- [Plaques Around the Province - Working People Built BC](#)
- [Darshan Singh Sangha - Working People Built BC](#)

Global Map of Plaques: Read the Plaque: A project of 99% Invisible – A global map of plaques that allows you to zoom in on specific locations:

- [Read the Plaque - Big Map](#)
- [Plaques+to+women+in+South+Asia - Search Images](#)
- [A Blue Plaque for Ayah's Home — Harpy. K. Grayson, UK.](#)

4. Design a Walking Tour or Walking/Driving Tour

Design a local or regional or global walking or walking/driving tour with between 5 to 8 places of interest. For each site, provide a description of the subject and explain why it is noteworthy. Include images with captions.

On writing entries, consult the information provided in projects 1 & 2.

Suggested length: an estimated 250 words for each place of interest for a total of 1250-2000 words. But the entries themselves may vary in length.

On walking tours, consult a few examples:

- [Jane's Walk Toronto | community building](#)
- [parkdale-sites-of-resistance | Jane's Walk Toronto Festival](#)
- [east-chinatown-tour | Jane's Walk Toronto Festival](#)

On designing your own tour:

- [Create Your Own Walking Tour of Historical Landmarks K. Woods '24](#)

On using Google Maps to create a walking or driving tour:

- [How to Create a Tour Using Google Maps for a School Project - YouTube](#)
- [Making and Taking Tours with Google Earth](#) (Eric Curts)

For illustration and design ideas, see:

- [Rise Up & Remember – Rediscover Feminist Toronto](#)

5. Design a Mural

An individual or group project to design a mural (urban art or graffiti) related to your theme. Explain the title, choice of elements (figures, symbols, slogans, design) and the scale (500-1000 words). The portfolio may include

sketches, images, and panel(s). To actually paint your mural on a large mural roll of paper, ask your instructor about obtaining the materials.

Consult some examples of striking urban murals:

- [5 Murals \(and Neighbourhoods\) to Visit in Vancouver | Destination Vancouver](#) (Feb 6, 2025)
- [The 23 Best Graffiti And Murals in Toronto \[2025\]](#)
- [Beyond The Streets London: A celebration of graffiti and street art](#) CULT, euronews, 2023

On urban artists working in different contexts:

- [Famous Pakistani Graffiti Artists | DESIblitz](#) Ayesha Ali, 2020
- [Artists Are Painting Murals to Preserve the Culture of this Neighbourhood in Sri Lanka](#) Jayson Albano, *Vice*, 2020

These resources deal with different types of murals, but offer useful advice (e.g., decide on the purpose, location, audience, and style):

- [How to Plan and Design a Painted Wall Mural - MadeByBarb](#)
- [PLANNING-A-MURAL-PROJECT---QUICK-GUIDE.pdf](#)
- [12 Key Steps to Leading Amazing Mural Projects - The Art of Education](#)
- [File:Graffiti in malibag-mogbazar flyover 30.jpg - Wikimedia Commons](#)

6. Create a Short Podcast

An individual or group project to produce a 30-minute podcast.

The podcast may focus on a person, group, event, or site related to your theme. Make use of your historical materials and additional research to create the content. Inform listeners about different aspects of the subject and explain its importance.

Suggested length of script: 1500-2000 words.

This resource assumes a podcast series, but offers help with various formats - interview, solo, non-fictional storytelling, educational:

Sayani Chakraborty, Podcast Examples, Rebellink, 2022:

- [10 Most Popular Podcast Examples: Which One Is Yours?](#)

For instructions on downloading, installing, and using Audacity, visit:

- [Audacity Support | Audacity Support](#)

7. Conduct an interview. Recommended for senior students.

Compelling oral histories published in *Diva* include Jyoti Sanghera, “Passing through Whorls of Memory,” Pt 1 (Dalip Kaur), Vol. 2, Issue 2 (Jan 1990): 7-17 AND Pt 2 (Darshan Kaur) Vol. 2, Issue 3 (July 1990): 35-40.

An individual project to prepare for, conduct, and reflect on an interview with someone whose experiences relate to your theme.

Suggested length: 30 mins –1 hour interview. Text: 2000 words

On the importance of respecting and establishing trust with your interview subject, and obtaining informed consent, consult the resources below. Ask your instructor whether you are required to go through a formal ethical review process with your institution.

If you cannot interview a person of South Asian origins or an activist of any origin who worked with South Asians, you may interview someone else whose experiences relate in some way to the theme you researched.

Ask open-ended questions that allow your interviewee to decide what and how much to say. Listen carefully. Do not stick so closely to your questions that you disregard what they wish to speak about.

Consult your instructor about providing a partial or full transcript or a video file of your recorded interview. Again, consent to use it is required.

Senior students might prepare 20 questions: 7 about biographical details but most meant to solicit recollections. Lower-level students who secure the instructor's permission to conduct an interview might prepare 10 questions: 4 about biographical details but most meant to elicit recollections.

Consult the resources below on the ethics of interviewing, which address the entire interview process as well as best practices:

- Santa Clara, The Hub, On Effective & Ethical Interviewing:
[HUB Resource Conducting Interviews](#)
- Oral History Association Principles and Best Practices:
[OHA Principles and Best Practices - Oral History Association](#)
- Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling, Concordia University - Ethics, Steven High:
<https://storytelling.concordia.ca/resources/ethics/>

Consult some oral histories:

- [South Asian Oral History Project Digital Collection](#) University of Washington Libraries
- [Amy Laly, Interview - Amy Laly, video - South Asian Oral History Project - University of Washington Digital Collections](#)
- A LOT Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony (Director, Dr. E. Chenier)

- [Activism and Social Justice | Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony](#)
- [QMUNITY's Stories of Older Queers | Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony](#)
- [Adrienne Bradley | Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony](#)

On interviewing South Asian activists and on becoming activists:

- Ponni Arasu and Uma Chakravarti, "Living, Documenting, and Reflecting on Feminism and Activism in India," in K. Srigley, S. Zembrzycki, F. Iacovetta, eds, *Beyond Women's Words: Feminisms and the Practices of Oral History in the 21st Century* (London/New York: Routledge, 2018), ch. 8: 109-25.
- Suroopa Mukherjee, *Surviving Bhopal: Dancing Bodies, Written Texts, and Oral Testimonials of Women in the Wake of an Industrial Disaster* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)

On Interviewing Trauma Survivors:

This requires preparation, empathy, skill, and informed consent. To minimize the risk of re-traumatization, do all you can to make your interviewee feel safe and respected. Provide questions beforehand. Make it clear that they may pause or end the interview at any point. Acknowledge an expressed emotion and give them time to pause and/or end the interview. Offer support but do not assume the role of therapist.

Resources include:

- [The Memory of Painful Pasts, April 19, 2024](#) Webinar with Dr. Nena Močnik, Dr. Ngozika Anthonia Obi-Ani, and Dr. Małgorzata Łukianow (youtube, 1:30 mins)
- E.L. Vickers, "Unexpected Trauma in Oral Interviewing," in *The Oral History Review*, 46, no.1 (2019):134–141.
- Sean Field, "Beyond 'Healing': Trauma, Oral History and Regeneration," *Oral History* 34, no.1 (2006): 31-42.