

Reviewed by Victoria Rowe, Chuo University, Tokyo, Japan

Early Women’s Writing in Orissa, 1898–1950: A Lost Tradition seeks to recover and introduce a new generation of readers to writing by the pioneering literary women of the Indian state of Orissa. In order to achieve this goal, the editor and translator of this volume, Sachidananda Mohanty, engaged in extensive archival research to locate women’s literary works in the Oriya language. In addition to finding their literary works, Mohanty also recreates the biographies of these women writers to reveal fascinating and largely untold stories. Many of these women writers were well-known to their contemporaries as writers and as activists who wrote on issues such as the importance of female education, economic emancipation and trade union movements as well as social restrictions, such as the impropriety of widow remarriage, and the complexities and effects of colonial domination, independence struggles and partition. In the introduction to the book Mohanty remarks: “As I dug deeper, I learned that not only had the early literary women of Orissa left their footprints on every issue and event of consequence, they were often at the forefront of many such events/movements. They struggled against great odds, but sadly their legacy lies forgotten in the musty chambers of archives” (p 35).

Due to this kind of neglect, and the contempt of certain contemporary critics who told Mohanty that if these women’s writing had been any good they would be remembered, the volume Early Women’s Writing in Orissa, 1898–1950: A Lost Tradition fulfils an important function in acquainting the reader with this lost tradition of women’s thought and activism. The book introduces the literary works of twenty women writers. At the beginning of each chapter Mohanty includes a brief biographical account of the writer, including her involvement in education or liberation or economic movements, and situates the writer in the literary milieu of the day. The remainder of each chapter consists of a sample of the writer’s works. The genres represented in this volume range from poetry, non-fiction essays on the rights of women, travelogues, autobiographical pieces, short stories, excerpts from novels and letters from prison.
The texts of many of these writers struggles to reconcile social demands and expectations of femininity and women’s roles as daughters-in-law, wives and mothers with individual desires for education, articulation of the self, and expressions of personal creativity. These conflicting demands are revealed in the poetry of Bidyut Prabha Devi (1926–1977) who wrote in the poem “The Assault”:

“Is the life of a woman
meant only for childbirth?
Only for drudgery and fuel?
There is no joy
in holding a pen,
and no pleasure in its abandonment.

Writing is the greatest
elixir of all.
Whoever has savoured it,
Can she escape its lure?
Never mind the many pitfalls
On the way.” (p 229)

*Early Women’s Writing in Orissa, 1898–1950: A Lost Tradition* demonstrates that a group of women in the Indian state of Orissa, between the years 1898 and 1950, wrote powerfully and originally about their lives and clearly desired to participate in all aspects of political and literary life.

*A Space of Her Own: Personal Narratives of Twelve Women* edited by Leela Gulati and Jasodhara Bagchi explores the lives and intergenerational relationships between women within their natal families. Eight of the narratives began as part of a workshop on women’s lives at the Centre for Development Studies when the participants were asked to reflect on the importance of the lives of mothers and grandmothers in relation to their own identity formation. As Carolyn M. Elliot describes in the introduction “Our writers were asked not how they as young wives fit into the duties and structure of their marital families, but what kinds of connections they maintained with women of their natal families, that is, their mothers and grandmothers. Thus, it asked them
to reflect on the emotional lines of matriliny within the social structure of patriliny” (p10). Although Elliot explains the writers found it neither possible nor useful to completely extract these relationships from the larger narrative of interfamilial relationships, what emerges is a compelling, and often painful, portrait by the writers of women in their families. The life stories reveal the struggles and hidden strengths of grandmothers and mothers whose lives were not documented and are not part of the historical record.

Through these real family narratives a picture emerges that challenges some of the notion of women’s historical subservience to patriarchal traditions. For example in Zarina Bhattiy’s account is the fascinating story of her aunt as a young woman in Lucknow defying convention by refusing to stay silent when an unwelcome marriage was arranged for her. The image of her posting signs on her neighbour’s doors requesting help to save her from the marriage is a forceful one. Likewise, the portrait in Vina Mazumdar’s account of her aunt, Pramada, who, despite familial opposition, defied family convention by advocating for her young sisters-in-law to be educated, reveals that women did not always passively accept custom or taboos and could be a source of strength for one another. The authors, the daughters, the nieces and granddaughters of these women, derived strength from family stories of female rebellion and support as they each struggled to gain their own space in order to form individual identities and pursue educational, creative or career goals. At the same time, however, the narratives reveal the difficulties women face in pursuing goals that are not centred on marriage and motherhood or when patriarchal controls become overwhelming. The narratives describe how grandmothers and mothers troubles due to hasty, ill-planned marriages, or impoverished circumstances, or early widowhood or domestic violence, affect women’s emotional and physical state and hence their relationship with daughters and granddaughters.

The narratives do not romanticise women’s interfamilial relationships; clearly not all relationships between women are positive or empowering. For example, Nabaneeta Dev Sen’s grandmother who had no smiles for her granddaughters and is described by her granddaughter as someone against “women’s education and widow remarriage, hated girl children in general, doted on boys, and had blind spots and favourites” (p 23). As Dev Sen’s account demonstrates women’s internalization of oppression can make them complicit in aiding patriarchy. The Afterword: “The Colonised Coloniser” by Arlie Hochschild at the end of A Space of Her Own: Personal Narratives of Twelve Women addresses this paradox of many women’s victimisation by, yet their enforcement of, patriarchal rules.
The narratives in *A Space of Her Own: Personal Narratives of Twelve Women* are thought-provoking and attempt to unravel in a highly nuanced way the complexities of female identity and how strengths and weaknesses are passed down from mothers to daughters.


Reviewed by Dianne Sallee, University of Newcastle

Arlie Russell Hochschild's book *The Commercialization of Intimate Life: Notes from Home and Work*, is a sociological study of the impact that capitalism, and globalization has on the family unit. Addressing what she believes is an incomplete study of this important topic, Hochschild focuses her attention on the issues of love and care within the family. This is particularly pertinent in Western societies today as more women enter the workforce, and care for the young and aged have become commodified. According to Hochschild consumerism, capitalism and globalization have not only created a revolution in the role of women, but have also shifted the dynamics of the family unit. This has prompted Hochschild to comment that for some people she interviewed, 'family life had become more like "work" and work had become more like "home".'

Challenging the reader to deduce 'what affects the fate of love and care' Hochschild presents a compilation of essays, written over a period of thirty years, which not only pinpoint many of the issues she feels affects familial emotions, but also offers insightful resolutions to a number of them. Divided into five parts, these essays cover topic areas such as culture, emotion, family and work, and care. In the last section Hochschild reviews her own, and by default other female academics', career and life choices, as she negotiated the male oriented career system of academe.

In the first section social and cultural shifts in the ideology of women's roles are investigated through the pages of 'advice books' ranging from 1973 through to the early 1990s. While these 'advice books' reflect the influence of feminist ethos Hochschild suggests they also reveal a 'cultural cooling' in respect to intimate life.

In the following section of her book, Hochschild points out the relatively limited attention sociologists have paid to the emotions and feelings basic to human social life. Believing that