

## **A Friend of One's Own: Friendships, Sociality and Everyday Interactions in Bengal**

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My book manuscript, tentatively titled *A Friend of One's Own: Friendships, Sociality and Everyday Interactions in Bengal*, is a monograph on women's friendships in various spaces. Using Bengali autobiographies as my primary archives, my manuscript questions the arc of history writing, and asks what constitutes history. Women's autobiographical texts, where they highlighted various modes of sociality among women, are constructions of histories that center their everyday experiences. Using the framework of the biographical arch of one Muslim woman, I show how women utilized opportunities for socializing in sites newly accessible to middle-class women, creating a space for women to come together despite differences in identities and backgrounds. I argue that social connections among women provide an alternative history of Bengal during the twentieth century.

This surge in women's writings about their own histories over the last few decades can be seen as constituting yet another sphere of sociality, since the act of writing itself is a form of both remembering and inscribing modes of sociality. The Bengali texts that make up my sources were written from the 1940s to the 2010s, and include autobiographies originally published in Bengali and later translated to English. As historians have been unearthing and writing about women's writings, many women who lived through the major changes of the twentieth century were convinced by friends and family to write of their experiences and histories. Many women stated that they were hesitant to write an autobiography, saying that they did not feel worthy; however, the existence of these memoirs shows that they wrote anyway.

I am invested in examining why women wrote and the contexts that shaped these autobiographical texts. Some may have felt a necessity to look back at a time that was different than their present. Another conjecture for the timing of women writing and publishing their autobiographies, decades after the events they describe, could be the period of crisis of secularism and doubts in their new postcolonial nation states. In Bangladesh, many of the women who wrote in the years after 1990s lived through the Ershad era, when religious freedom was in danger while in India, it was the aftermath math of increased communal violence. The women whose autobiographies I utilize wrote retrospective histories: we see how and why they choose to write and what their conception of their histories are.

**Short Biography:** Farida Begum is a Postdoctoral Fellow at Colgate University, NY. She earned a PhD in History from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Her interests are in South Asian history, gender and sexuality studies, and global histories of imperialism. She is currently working on a book project on women's sociality and friendships in twentieth-century Bengal through an examination of women's autobiographical writings.