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Contributor Thank you very much for asking me to the 'Indian traces in Oxford' event. And thanks to the, 'Making Britain', overarching organisation.

It's very nice to talk, I'm not- I haven't often talked about my aunt, although I dare say I will start now.

The first picture is the earliest one I have of her, it's from 1888 to 1889 when she was waiting in India to see whether or not she would get the scholarship which did bring her to Oxford in the end.

`[[Eleka 0:00:40]]` mentioned my book, that's the cover. But, of course, she wrote her own autobiography which is very fascinating, I think. But what I've found is that about half of what happened she had to leave out of it, because it was too sensitive in various ways.

Sensitive in so many directions. The identities are concealed of her Purdahnashins clients. The behaviour, often very decent by colonial standards, but sometimes really the worst of public schoolboy behaviour of British Civil servants, which is very seldom known about.

There were many things, her own personal love life, which are absolutely concealed. 50% is missing. I have some of the letters and diaries and so on. Most of them my family sent to the British library and her friend Eleanor sent. So, there's an awful lot which isn't in the autobiography which I hope will be in the public domain very shortly.

Now, she came from a family that was tremendously interested in education. My grandmother set up four schools in Poona, starting in 1875. The English speaking school has just had its centenary, I went out- oh, I'm sorry that was the revival. I withdraw that. And aunt revived the schools after they'd been closed, I was getting confused.

In 1875 there was an English speaking school set up. There was an infants' school for Zoroastrians who had to learn English, if they wanted to go on to the big school. And then there were free schools for poor Hindus speaking Marathi and for poor Muslims speaking Urdu. So she set up four schools.

The non-poor schools, English speaking and Guajarati speaking are still standing, because they were in the grounds of the house that the family was renting. And I found, to my great surprise, last January that not only was the house standing and the school building standing, but although my family vacated the house a hundred years ago, the family furniture is there. The pictures, the grand piano, the grandfather clock, the beds, my grandparent's stained glass window.

But, of course, two careful ateliers took over the premises and thought this was just the right furniture for attracting hotel guests. So there it is, in Poona. My grandfather was very keen that the seven daughters should go to university, but, on the first two daughters, Bombay university refused.

The first one he managed to get into university was Cornelia, who matriculated at the age of 16. She'd been taught by her older sister, aged 16, my aunt Mary. And, in spite of great hostility from the non-Parsi students in her college, she out top of the Deccan college, Poona, which was a branch of the Bombay university, in 1888, with one of the four firsts from Bombay university in that year.

And she had high hopes that that would mean she would get one of the government scholarships to come and continue her studies in English literature in England. But, after a wait it was refused on the grounds that she was a woman, and it had not been envisaged that a woman could qualify for the scholarship.

However, a question was raised in Parliament about this, by Sir John Kennaway, descendant of the Aide de Camp of Cornwallis. And the Secretary of State for India in 1888 had said, yes, indeed this had been the grounds for refusing the scholarship but, at present, the scholarship was not open to women.

Well, that caused some aristocratic ladies, chiefly Lady Hobhouse, whose husband was on the privy council, a lawyer who'd been on the Viceroy's council as the Law Member. It caused her to get up a scholarship amongst distinguished English women. Madeleine Shaw Lefevre, the first Principal of Somerville was one of the ones. Florence Nightingale was another.

Florence Nightingale, who of course was sick by that time, had a special interest in sanitation and nursing in India. And she got the scholarship, after the wait, and came to England, initially to London.

After some deliberation, because this subject would be closed to her, and that subject would be closed to her, her big hope of studying law didn't seem to be practical, so she came up to Somerville, which was then in its 10th year, to study English, which she had of course already studied. And continued with English, though the Anglo-Saxon was new to her.

And that year, the second Principal of Somerville had been appointed, the glamorous Miss Maitland, only 40. And I know exactly what she wore, because Cornelia tells us exactly what she wore. And she used to go skating with her on the Cherwell. So, she was quite a glamorous second head for Somerville.

Now, we've got photographs there. If we could have the second and third pictures. This is from Cornelia's autograph book. Madeleine Shaw Lefevre did this watercolour and signed it, of a place where she must have been staying in Farnham. It wasn't her home, I think, because it's dated as if she was just making a stay there. I mean staying in the country for a week or so was very much a way of life, and Cornelia herself was always doing it.

So there, what I take to be Madeleine Shaw Lefevre's own watercolour, and her signature. And then, the next one, the second head of Somerville, the Principal of Somerville, Miss Maitland. I've got her autograph on the next photograph, and a picture of the new West building in Somerville. And I think Cornelia was one of the first active occupants, because it was much better heated than the first building.

The West building was the second building, and it was thought she'd be cold when she came from India. So, that is what I take to be the West building, I hope I haven't got that wrong. And there's Agnes Maitland's signature, up at the top.

She had a special residents tutor, a Miss Pater, Emily Pater, I think, the sister of Walter Pater, who wrote 'Epicurus' – 'Marius the Epicurean'. Walter Pater was often in and out of the college, and his books went there in the end.

And so it was very residential, and they took their dinners in, in the West building, with Miss Pater. And Miss Pater sat next to a different woman every evening. But, in the fifth week of her first term, Benjamin Jowett came into the college. And Miss Maitland summoned Cornelia and said she was to meet Benjamin Jowett.

And Benjamin Jowett invited Cornelia to dinner in Balliol, but of course had to invite Miss Maitland, because no woman student could go to Balliol college, or any other men's' college without a chaperone. And Miss Maitland had to be the chaperone at dinner.

She had to be many other things. She had to be the chaperone when Cornelia went to the dentist. You couldn't possibly let a young Somerville lady go to the dentist unattended. The Principal of the college went. When Cornelia went to have tea with my father's friends, her brother's friends in Christ Church, Miss Maitland came along to tea in Christ Church too. That was one of the jobs of the Principal.

Cornelia insisted on wearing saris, and insisted that when her sisters visited England, they would all wear saris. And she writes letters to them telling them exactly what saris to bring, which ones for different seasons, how to get the hems made up in Poona before they arrived.

And they did, for the rest of their lives, all wear saris, even though their mother had had them wear Western dress in Poona itself. That never happened in England. And, indeed, the seven sisters increasingly wore saris all the time, even the ones who stayed in Poona. It was Cornelia who insisted on that.

Now, Jowett came to take Cornelia to dinner, and onto the Balliol concert about five times a term, from then onwards. He had actually given an organ to Balliol, additional to the one in the chapel. Installed in the hall, it's still there because he actually created the Balliol concerts which are still flourishing.

And he took her on his arm. And 30 years later, one of her fellow students said to her, "We always used to be absolutely amazing, Cornelia, to see you going into Balliol hall", sometimes Jowett on her arm, and sometimes it was the other way around, "Because we were all absolutely terrified of Jowett. And, when summoned to breakfast, our teeth were chattering, and you never looked frightened at all."

Well she wasn't frightened, she really thought this was absolutely wonderful, and she never was frightened. Jowett introduced her to the leading Victorians. They really were the leading Victorians. A little bit later, he sent Cornelia and her brother, my father, to visit Tennyson, shortly before his death and Tennyson read them the unpublished version of what I imagine must have been his last poem, which was 'Akbar'.

He wanted to try it out on two young Indians, to see whether he'd got any of the details wrong. Cornelia was sent to visit Florence Nightingale, who remained very interested in parts of the work that she was doing. Sanitation for Purdahnashins was a part of Cornelia's work.

Jowett was a very, very big figure for her. But she was very fortunate also, to be in Somerville, because Somerville was fighting this uphill battle for women's groups to be recognised. They'd only had 10 years of this. And Cornelia was coming from a family of educationalists, who believed in educating women from India.

Her mother was very proud of having seven daughters, and only one son. She was coming from a family that believed in the education of women, to a pioneering college, one of the first two in Oxford to be educating women.

And she benefitted from the fact that, in Oxford, there were people who'd been very supportive of Somerville. Max Müller was actually one of them. So, some of the people she met- and she was feted as if she was a celebrity, because the denied scholarship had been in 'The Queen Magazine', which was very much a society magazine, and had been raised in Parliament.

She was treated as a celebrity from the first. But many of these people were sponsors of Somerville. Mrs Max Müller and Max Mueller were one such couple. She got to know Max Müller terribly well, and he played hide and seek with her in the august surrounds of the All Souls Codrington Library.

I can't think of anywhere more august in Oxford. Perhaps I'm thinking on my toes, I'm not immediately thinking of anywhere more august. There was a party to which she was invited in the Codrington Library, and Max Müller said, come with me. And he took her up through some back bits of library, round some stairs and floors and so on.

And finally, they got to the really top balustrade and shouted "Cooee!", down! He was very like that. Of course, Cornelia also knew Monier Williams, and she used to go and visit Monier Williams in London. And Monier Williams was terribly bitter, because she'd retired by that time. Terribly bitter at the reception of Max Müller.

So bitter that he absolutely refused ever to come to Oxford again, not that Oxford was in a big hurry to invite him. But he was invited to things and he declined. And I wish I'd known we were going to be talking about Monier Williams, because Cornelia has a list of about 10 epithets for Monier Williams, and another 10 epithets for Max Müller.

A total contrast. Bitterness versus sort of Puckish flamboyant imagination. And she was very often at his house in Norham Gardens. Well, that was the Somerville connection, rather than the Jowett connection. But most of the Victorians she met were, I think due to Benjamin Jowett.

She had a policy, Cornelia, that she refused all invitations from younger men because, and this is my belief. I think it was because her oldest two sisters, the two who had been denied permission to matriculate at Bombay university, got taken by surprise by men who fancied them.

Well, they were very attractive and nice looking and articulate and so on. But who was going to marry them? This is what took them by surprise. You see, they weren't Muslims, weren't Hindu. They were Parsi, but then they weren't Zoroastrian. They were quite a dark shade of brown, and yet they spoke absolutely perfect English with the accent of the Establishment, and had English manners.

So, you know, they were attractive but who was actually going to marry them? The first two were caught by surprise. And Cornelia was absolutely determined that she would not be caught by surprise. And she tells us who her favourite old men were, but all her friends were old men. Her favourite three were Benjamin Jowett, Lord Hobhouse, who took her to the privy council and the High Court, to watch a trial and so on.

And Mountstuart Grant Duff who'd been Governor of Bombay, and was now a big figure in Royal Society, before it had hived off the British Academy. These were her favourite three, and, just in case there is anybody who feels this is a good policy, although I won't tell the story now, because it's not an Oxford story, it isn't actually safe, I have to tell you, always to think older men are safe.

But that would be a later part of the story. She was safe with all the ones she met in Oxford.

After a year, she was suddenly told that if she really wanted to study law, she could give up English literature. Her English literature tutor, Dr `[[Wright 0:17:33]]`, who was certain she'd get a first in Gothic and Anglo-Saxon, was absolutely devastated.

But here, she'd got her real chance. Jowett had set up, with Sir William, the Reader in Law, a special course for her in Law. And so she had got her heart's desire. You see, her ambition, as she tells it, and she does slightly improve the story in her different versions, but I don't find her telling absolute falsehoods. Her story was that when she was very young, a lady came in trouble to her mother.

And this lady was in Purdah. Well Purdah normally means not just a little veil across the face. Purdah is actually a curtain, and women who went into Purdah, and this is all her clients, when

she finally got a job, just never left the house again. You see, they were child brides, and, if she was dealing with them, they were almost certainly widows.

They might be child widows. They were child brides. If you married in infancy, then preferably married at any rate by four, failing that married by eight, or, at the absolute extreme, married by 11. As soon as they were married, all education stopped. If they were widowed, they had tremendous property rights, far greater than any English woman had at the time.

But these property rights were on paper, because they couldn't see a single lawyer. All lawyers were male. They couldn't see any male other than their husband, who'd now departed if they were widows. So, they were absolutely unenforceable rights.

And, she says that her mother said to all the girls- not the first two girls of course, who got caught by surprise, but to the next batch of girls, "What are you going to do for India when you grow up?". Because that's what she believed in, the girls would do something for India.

And she wanted to help these women, because if they didn't have a woman lawyer, how could they exercise their quite extensive legal rights? Extensive if they were widows. Of course, I'm talking only of her wealthy clients, because only wealthy people could afford this very expensive life of putting all their women in separate quarters, the Zenana, from which they would never emerge again.

Or, if they emerged, they would emerge in Purdah cars that came, eventually, to be Purdah cinemas and Cornelia arranged there should be Purdah shopping days, where there were curtains and veils. And she created Purdah parties, I think her mother had had them too. And she got vicereine Lady Minto, in 1905, to also give Purdah parties, where you just put tents up, so that no male can see the women coming.

So, there were things they could do. Her work was going to be to increase the number of things that she could do, but she never persuaded any man to allow Purdah women to have bank accounts. They had to keep any valuables they had under the floor. So they were very, very disadvantaged, even though many of them were very wealthy.

This is what her life's ambition was and she did, with great difficulty, achieve it eventually.

Finally, it came to the time for her exam and she had been switched to actually taking the Bachelor of Civil Law at Oxford, the first woman ever to sit. But, the London examiner said he'd never examined a woman before and he wasn't going to now. And he wouldn't have her sit in the examination schools. She must... if she wanted to take it in Somerville, that was her affair, but then of course, it wouldn't be official.

He was not going to officially examine her, as a woman, in the Bachelor of Civil Law. Bachelor of Civil Law then counted as a post graduate degree, and many of the people who were taking it had been in Chambers in London for some years, whereas she had spent most of the year studying English Literature, and was trying to do the rest in two years, from being an undergraduate.

Well, on the eve of her exam, Jowett asked her, "Would you be content to just sit the examination in Somerville?". And she said, "No, I certainly would not be content.". So, Jowett called the Oxford University Council together, and it passed a decree saying, "Oxford University shall examine Cornelia Sorabji." And so, she went the next day, and now I've got a bit to read.

So, if you would take the one bit of manuscript we've done there. I haven't- I've only done one page of it, but I'll read a few little bits to you. She says, "I followed the clerk", this is in the examination schools, 1892. "I followed the clerk to my place, in the wake of the ancient fathers." Ancient fathers, of course, because they were all so much older than her. They'd been doing law in London for years and years, some of them.

"I followed the clerk to my place, in the wake of the ancient fathers to the funeral pyre." Almost a `[[?? 0:23:18]]` reference to the cases of `[[?? 0:23:20]]`, who she would have to deal with later, 90 years after it been supposedly abolished.

"I was not all frightened. I was quite calm outwardly, but very curious as to what would happen, half fearing that I would have to scratch", i.e. retire, "because I knew nothing. Half despairing, but I thought of the dear little service in St Giles...", she often went to church just outside of Somerville, St Giles' church.

"... and of it's being Whit Monday, and how my dear number 80 civil lines in Poona, and other people were thinking of me." That little bit is on there. And then they were rather beastly to her, and she got a third. She was terribly disappointed, but of course it wasn't really surprising, trying to do the thing in two years.

She wrote home. "As Dick", her brother, "and perhaps others will tell you, results are out. I am only third class." She underlines. "This is a frightful disappointment for I hoped for a second, and should have got it, but for my abject stupidity. The world in general seeks to console me, they say I ought to be proud of it, and all the rest.

But I am conceited enough to feel it. There were no firsts, as the papers will have told you, and only two seconds. And it's the hardest exam Oxford has, and the other candidates had worked for five years and upwards. But, for all that, I should have got my second. It was that brute of a Nelson," the London examiner, "who lost me my last chances. He did not want me in at all, and made the fuss about the exam, which eventually gave me my decree.

And, when I was on for viva, he bullied my life out. He was brutal enough to the men, who shook before him. And he tried the same on me, together with horrid jeers. I turned and rent him before I left, for Professor Dicey had told me that something in his book on 'Private Int. Law" is that International Law? "...was questionable. And I said, in answer to a question which produced this point, "Some writers think so and so, but it's wrong."

He looked as if he'd like to kill me, but he only jeered and asked reasons, which, having read it, I hurled at his head." And then, having got her third, Jowett called her in at once, "The master was so sweet. And he made me go to Balliol that night, and insisted on taking me in and making me sit by him. And he told me he'd been talking me over with the examiners etc. , and they said I was very clever."

And roughly speaking, she had a wonderful memory for case law, this wasn't good for answering examination questions at speed, but that wasn't what mattered. What mattered in later life was her outstanding memory of the case law, which had amazed the examiners.

I think it throws light on the enormous trouble that Jowett took. He also took it over my father... the enormous trouble that Jowett took over every single one of his students.

There was a last meeting with Jowett, just before she finally went down. "The dear master took me into the study that night to have a quiet talk.", this is for a second time. "We discussed many things, and he gave me courage and counsel for the future. The things he said will always remain with me. Nothing put in his quaintest way could fail.

He sent two little notes, one to the India office, and one to his friend, Miss Nightingale", which led to the visit, and led to the identification of Florence Nightingale as the person as to whom Jowett had proposed. My aunt was the confident who was first told that.

"And then I said a farewell, and the dear `[[Courtfield 0:27:05]]` gentleman kissed my hand as he gave me his benediction, "God bless you dear." Alas that I may never see him again, in those distant days when I revisit Oxford halls."

Well, just to complete the picture, I think I ought to say, what, with that wonderful start, she did do. It took her 10 years to persuade the British to give her a job. Maharajas were much more open minded than the British. Maharajas didn't mind giving a woman a job.

But they got her to defend an elephant. In one case, they got her to defend an elephant against the Maharaja who turned out to be the judge! She thought this was frivolous, she often thought things

were frivolous. George Bernard Shaw offered to put a play on in the West End, if only she'd had something in about Lord Curzon.

Well, it was a translation, I've got it on my desk, never published. A translation of the Sanskrit, 'The Clay Cart'. She was so angry with Bernard Shaw (she was only a student), who'd been so frivolous to want something about Lord Curzon put in a Sanskrit play, that she threw it in the corner of the room. It's still on my desk.

Well, anyhow, she had to meet the opposition of almost everybody. And I mean even the people who liked her said, "Look, my dear, a woman can't be a lawyer. Don't ask us for that. Anything else you'd like?"

Curzon was very much against her. With the Maharajas it was useless, because in the Princely states you couldn't get any evidence about women. The men, it was, who knew whether their allowances had been illegally stopped and so on, and the men weren't going to speak. You couldn't get the information in the Princely states.

It was in British India, with widows, where the British took over the administration. And that was the only way she finally decided she could get a job, a legal job. And, many times did the British promise her, pass one more exam and we'll make you a barrister. And every time, they violated it for 10 years. So, for the last 5 of those 10 years, she invented this job of being the go-between between the British and the Purdahnashins, explaining each to the other. And getting the Purdahnashins their rights.

She only got it for an Oxford reason. After everybody had said "No", for ten years, it just happened that one of her Oxford sponsors who'd been head of Merton College, a man called Broderick, one of the supporters of Somerville, had a brother who was made Secretary of State for India.

Now, there's only one person superior to the Viceroy, and that's the Secretary of State for India. He fixed up that she'd get a job. He fixed it up that she'd get a job in Bengal, Orissa, Assam, and that of course includes Curzon's East Bengal, Bihar. But, quite a large chunk of India.

And, so she was appointed in 1904, after a 10 year campaign. Very suddenly, just through a change of Secretary of State. And she had 18 years of absolutely amazing success. She spent a lot of time being carried in a Palanquin through the jungles to these distant palaces.

In two cases, she rescued these young women, Purdahnashins, from attempted murder. At least, she calls it attempted murder. She gained confidence and slowly she began- not to change her way of life, she didn't believe in converting to Christianity, that was just for her Christianity.

She believed in cherishing their beliefs, but just changing those beliefs that caused them damage. So, first she forced the Dufferin Hospital in Calcultta to train six of them as nurses, which was a revolution really, these people who normally wouldn't leave the house. And then, eventually, she got a very wealthy Purdahnashin, a Muslim, to spearhead a social work.

Social work, not for Purdahnashins any longer, but social work by these people who'd previously been in Purdah. Well, of course they'd travelled out into the country or to the mill towns in Purdah carriages with curtains, but they were actually doing social work. So, this I think was what she most wanted to do.

She had 600 people under her care at any one time, but sometimes she went through three generations, so it was much more than 600. And her descriptions of their beliefs, their attitudes, very lovingly written are a unique record, I think. And she wrote very prolifically.

She retired in 1922, in 1923 she was able to collect her degree, 30 years late. She was called to the bar in England. She returned for seven years to act as a barrister, but that was harder still, for of course men who had opposed her being any kind of lawyer, liked even less the idea that they might be defeated in public by a woman. And so she met much stronger opposition there.

I knew her in the 1940's, when, of course she was confined by the war to England. And she used to come down to Oxford where I was growing up, and very, very much wanted to be a lawyer.

And some of the techniques she used, I subsequently discovered, were exactly the things that Lord Hobhouse had done for her back in 1892. But I only discovered that quite recently.

So, towards the end she was coming down to Oxford again. Well, that's a little bit of a story, some of the Oxfordy bit of the story. Thank you.
