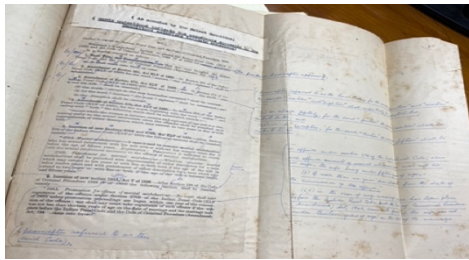


Melandra Castle Travel Prize 2024

My DPhil research focuses on analysing feminist engagement with rape law reform in India. Having completed the literature review and background research for my DPhil project, in my second year I needed to conduct archival research in Delhi to be able to map legislative and feminist advocacy efforts on rape law over the years. The Melandra Castle Fund enabled me to travel to Delhi and gain access to primary resources for my research.

In my time in Delhi, I spent the first two weeks at the National archives of Delhi. With the help of Deputy Director at the archives I was able to navigate the rich resources available. I spent time reading manuscripts and documents amending the rape law



Original record of one of the first amendments to the rape law in India introduced in the Parliament after independence

applicable in different provinces in pre-colonial India. I also gained access to original trial court judgments from the pre-partition era in India on rape allowing me to understand the influence of English law and traditions in shaping not just the

Indian rape law, but also the

jurisprudence and the manner in which colonial judges applied the law. Remnants of this influence continued to inform judgments on rape in post-colonial India. I also had a chance to access original documents containing complaints and record of follow up action on allegations of rape committed in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) submitted to the Ministry of Home Affairs in India. These

concerned alleged sexual assaults committed by men from certain communities on women from other communities living in East Bengal. The contents of these complaints and consequent official notes and follow up actions have helped me understand the history of how issues of religion and caste are intricately intertwined with the manner in which sexual assault is committed and adjudicated in modern day India.

I also had a chance to visit the National Commission for Women in Delhi which had played an important role in the development of the discourse on sexual assault, as well as amendments to the rape law in India since its inception in the 1990s. These visits helped me get acquainted with legal officers at the Commission who pointed me towards various resources in the Commission's library. I also filed multiple Right to Information requests to gain access to advocacy documents and minutes of meetings conducted in the 1990s at the National Commission for Women on reform of sexual assault laws in India. Studying the annual reports of the Commission from its inception helped me understand how the institution developed and shaped rape law reform in India. It also helped me gain insights into different efforts undertaken by the Commission to bring Indian feminists together to discuss and analyse issues related to



National Archives of India in Delhi



My desk at the National Archives



*National Commission for Women
in Delhi*

sexual assault with an aim to formulate coherent recommendations for law reform. Accessing and reading reports spanning over twenty years also allowed me to analyse the development and changes in views on sexual assault law reform over the years.

I also filed Right to Information requests with the Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Law requesting minutes of meetings and background documents that formed the basis of various Bills introduced in the Parliament recommending rape law amendments. I am currently following up on these requests.

In my time in Delhi, I also had the chance to speak with some scholars and activists who had been part of the Indian feminist movement in the 1990s. Through these conversations I was able to discover new helpful resources for my research, which I am currently exploring.

I am extremely grateful to have been jointly awarded the Melandra Castle Travel Prize. It provided me with the opportunity to access primary resources essential for my research and I hope through this work I am able to present a comprehensive analytical framework that can contribute to future discussions on sexual assault in feminist discourse and rape law reform in India. I also hope to inform future feminist engagement with rape law reform in India.

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All photos are taken (or asked to be taken) by me