

Institution: University of Cambridge
Unit of Assessment: UoA30
Title of case study: The Bengal diaspora project and 'Bangla Stories'
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The 'Bangla Stories' website is one of several outcomes of an ambitious, collaborative, interdisciplinary research project on the Bengal diaspora, led by Dr Joya Chatterji of the Faculty of History and funded by the AHRC.</p> <p>'Bangla Stories' encourages young people, in particular school children at Key Stage 3, to think about the history of migration and the experience of migrants. It stimulates classroom discussion about how and why people moved to Britain, survived, adapted and integrated there while remaining embedded in networks of community which often span the globe.</p> <p>The website is the product of an effective ongoing collaboration between academics, think-tanks, schools, community organisers and civil society groups.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Chatterji has had two periods of research in Cambridge, 1989-2000 (as research fellow and college lecturer at Trinity College) and 2007-13 (as University Lecturer and Reader). Her research in the first phase underpinned the project, and the particular work on the Bengal diaspora and 'Bangla Stories' was conducted almost entirely in the second.</p> <p>Chatterji's work on the consequences of the partition of India (3B) revealed fascinating patterns of movement, clustering and settlement among the millions displaced by it in 1947. It suggested that migration from the subcontinent to the west (mainly Britain) was part of the same process which stimulated the 'forced' movement of refugees across the borders of new South Asian states.</p> <p>To better understand these processes and the connections between them, while at the LSE Chatterji put together a team of academics, and in 2006 they were awarded a large, three-year AHRC grant. Besides Chatterji (PI), the team included Dr Claire Alexander and two post-doctoral research assistants. In 2006-7 they began preliminary research. In October 2007, the leadership of the project moved with Chatterji to Cambridge. Two more ad hoc research assistants were appointed between 2007-9, to assist with research in Bangladesh and Pakistan respectively.</p> <p>The team chose to focus on Bengali Muslims, building on Chatterji's research on identity formation among this group (3A). Through a combination of macro-historical and micro-level empirical research at eight different sites in India, Bangladesh and Britain between 2007 and 2009, the project explored the complex factors that shaped their patterns of movement, settlement and identity-formation.</p> <p>Among many exciting findings, the research enabled Chatterji to develop a new concept in migration studies, that of 'mobility capital'. She defines this as a 'package' of goods possessed by migrants, made up, in varying proportions, of economic, cultural and social capital.</p> <p>Besides personal (or familial) histories of mobility, the migrants also had other assets, which proved more decisive in determining whether they chose to move, or to stay on. The migrants – whether classified as 'refugees or 'economic migrants' – all had 1) transferable skills, 2) moveable assets, and 3) good health. 4) Moreover, they had few obligations – whether religious or familial – for the day-to-day care of other persons.</p> <p>The last two elements of this 'bundle' proved, counter-intuitively, most decisive in determining whether an individual joined the flow of refugees, or stuck her ground and stayed on. In addition,</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

the precise mix of elements of their personal 'bundle' proved extremely significant in shaping individual migrants' choices of destination, their patterns of settlement (**3C**) and self-identification (**3D**). This research challenges the conventional notion that there is a clear distinction between 'forced' migrants and economic migrants – all studied in this project straddled this divide. Having moved within contexts of nation formation, ethnic and religious discrimination and violence, they can be seen as classic 'refugees'. But in fact all moved in grooves or along networks created by older forms of 'economic' mobility (**3C**).

The research also underlined the extent to which migrants experience and perform their identity differently in different settings, revealing the local and affective dimensions of community formation (**3D**). The international comparisons revealed how different circumstances of migration and arrival both opened up opportunities and constrained choice for migrants. While the wealthiest migrants settled in the west have gained greater agency as a consequence of their 'transnational' lifestyles, this experience has not always been shared by all refugees, nor by stayers on in South Asia (**3E**). For stayers-on, discrimination against minorities (legal, cultural and socio-economic) has meant that many were immobilized in locations where their rights and choices were severely limited (**3F**).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

(A) Joya Chatterji, 'The Bengali Muslim; a contradiction in terms?', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 16 (1997).

(B) Joya Chatterji, *The spoils of partition. Bengal and India 1947-1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

(C) Joya Chatterji, 'Dispositions and destinations: Refugee agency and "mobility capital" in the Bengal diaspora, 1947-2007', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55 (2013), 273-304.

(D) Joya Chatterji, 'Migration myths and the mechanics of assimilation: Two community histories from Bengal', *Studies in the Humanities and the Social Sciences* (Special Issue, February, 2013).

(E) Joya Chatterji, 'South Asian histories of citizenship, 1946-1972', *Historical Journal* 55 (2012), 1049-71.

(F) Joya Chatterji, 'The nation state and the management of migration: Rethinking the "post-colonial" immigration order', in J. Chatterji and D. Washbrook (eds) *The Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2013).

All of the above have undergone peer review.

GRANTS AND RESEACH FUNDING:

- Joya Chatterji: Principal Investigator, 2006-09, Arts and Humanities Research Council, Major Research Project on 'Diasporas, Migration and Identities'. Amount: £619,386. Project title: 'The Bengal diaspora. Bengali Muslim settlers in South Asia and Britain: a comparative and interdisciplinary study'.
- Joya Chatterji: Investigator, 1999-2000, John D and Catherine T MacArthur Foundation Research and Writing Award. Amount: US\$50,000. Project title: 'Exodus from the east. Bengali refugees in India'.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

From the outset, the Bengal diaspora project was conceived as a new way of conducting cutting-edge research in partnership with the subjects of that research. This produced a sense of widely-shared ownership of the project, which in turn, propelled its impact and benefits along several different axes.

The 'Bangla Stories' website is a key example of this. Developed in 2009 as a unique partnership between Chatterji, the Bengal diaspora team, the Runnymede Trust, the LSE's Heif4 Knowledge Transfer fund and the Swadhinata Trust (a Bengali heritage organisation), the website was designed to disseminate the research findings outside academia, and to engage with schools and community groups. The LSE's Heif4 fund also supported the project as Alexander was then based there; she has since moved to Manchester University.

'Bangla Stories' brought the history of migration into British classrooms through the personal perspective of eight individuals, whose life histories provide an intimate portrait of their experience of displacement. It enables young people of different backgrounds to understand the flow of history and movement that shapes their world.

Bangla Stories' key beneficiaries are 11-15-year-olds, mainly from migrant backgrounds. It provides them (and their teachers) with basic information and training in research and digital media skills to investigate the histories of their families and communities. By giving them the tools and incentive to 'interview' their parents and grandparents about their experiences of migration, it encourages dialogue across generations and fosters a better understanding between them. This helps ease some of the deep tensions that often characterise relations between 'first generation' migrants and their British-born children.

Although focused on Bengali Muslim communities, the website and accompanying educational resource pack have provided an exemplary template of how to engage young people of all backgrounds in history at Key Stage 3.

"The Bengal Diaspora research has had an enormous impact on young people from a broad range of ethnic backgrounds right across the UK. The project led to the development of the BanglaStories website (www.banglastories.org) the aim of which was to bring these stories of migration, history, movement and identity outside the academy and into the classrooms of the next generation of British schoolchildren." **(5A)** Dr Debbie Weekes-Bernard, Senior Research & Policy Analyst, Education, Runnymede Trust.

The Runnymede Trust, Alexander and Chatterji have gained substantial follow-on funds from the AHRC to 'roll out' the project at four schools across Britain, to train pupils to do their own historical research into community stories of migration and belonging: Cardiff High School, Cathays High School (Cardiff), Parkwood Academy (Sheffield) and Judgemeadow Community College (Leicester) **(5B)**. One teacher at Cathays described the impact of the project on her students as 'a life changing experience for them in that it has ignited a real passion for research and has raised the aspirations of these young people' **(5C)**. Cardiff High School (where one Welsh pupil charted his family's history back to 1809!) embedded Bangla Stories into its Year 7 history curriculum in September 2012. In Leicester, parents' associations working with Somali children have used the website and a community development consultant commented on the impact of the research training that 'the opportunity for the young people to research and make short films and recordings about their histories offered an opportunity for bolstering pride, self-esteem and consequently confidence in their right to belong and participate in the city' **(5D)**. In Sheffield, the work of pupils who engaged with the project will be archived in the Sheffield Archives **(5F)**, and it is intended to archive the Welsh pupils' projects at the Cardiff Story Museum and the St Fagan's National History Museum. The project has been praised by the Chair of the North Hertfordshire Interfaith Forum for 'addressing difficult history in a powerful and innovative way'; it is, he writes, 'extremely bold and innovative to address [the missing history of the Asian diaspora] by getting children to engage in their own family migratory history', and he considers it 'a very good model for enhancing community self-understanding through the history curriculum' **(5G)**.

The website to date has logged over 50,085 'Absolute Unique Visitors'. It has attracted approximately 1,600 new visitors per month. 10% of them have returned to the site at least once. 1,908 people have visited the site over 200 times. 19.7% of the site's visitors are from the UK, many are in schools. The site has had 2,502 visits to the page 'For teachers'. 17% of unique visitors are from South Asia – India (7.6%) and Bangladesh (9.1%) – demonstrating

Impact case study (REF3b)

the links the project has forged between UK's research community and civil society in South Asia. The remaining visitors are from the United States (5.7%), Italy, the UAE, Canada, Germany, Finland, Singapore and Australia, demonstrating the global reach of the project's research and disseminating strategies for its results. 'The *Bangla Stories* site told the stories of less well known Bengali communities across Britain and also provide a unique comparative dimension, telling the stories of those migrants who remained in South Asia. The work was thus global in its reach, as well as telling more national and local stories, and this can be seen from the global audiences for the website.' (Swadhinata Trust, **5E**)

The significance of the website is illustrated by the willingness of the academic journal *Ethic and Racial Studies* and the Runnymede Trust to fund its launch in December 2009. Baroness Uddin hosted an event to launch the site and associated education pack at the House of Lords (2012). This event was attended by a class from Mulberry School, Tower Hamlets, community activists and the media and received widespread coverage from BBC Asian Network, the BBC World Service, and four Bengali TV channels (Channel S, Channel I, ATN Bangla, NTV). Articles on the website appeared in *Eastern Eye* (July 2010) and the *Runnymede Bulletin* (3,000 online subscribers, including government departments and 'third sector' organisations). Significantly, 'Bangla Stories' has been selected as a 'Curators' Choice' of the British Library for long-term preservation in the UK Web Archive.

Chatterji is also a member of the Brick Lane Circle, which promotes the understanding of migration to London's East End, and has spoken about her work at this forum as well as others in the UK and in South Asia (e.g. 'Network Bangla', a community networking organisation in the UK; the Community Development Organisation, Dinajpur, Bangladesh; Nijeri Kori, a 'self-help' community organization in Bangladesh). In these ways she has helped build enduring links between Britain's research community and civil society, not only within Britain itself, but also in South Asia (**5F**). One of the key benefits of her work to the United Kingdom has been that it seeks new ways to engage with a region of ever-increasing global importance, as highlighted in a recent AHRC report on 'high-impact research' relating to India that profiled 'Bangla Stories' (**5A**).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- (A) From the AHRC website: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/News-and-Events/Publications/Documents/UK%20and%20India.pdf>
- (B) *Making British Histories: Diversity and National Curriculum*, Runnymede Trust, available at <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/MakingBritishHistories-2012.pdf>
- (C) Email from History teacher at Cathays High School, Cardiff, 22 Nov. 2012
- (D) Letter from Development Consultant at Race Equality Coalition, Leicester
- (E) Letter from the Manager of the Swadhinata Trust
- (F) Letter from the Secretary of the Brick Lane Circle, 19 Sep. 2013
- (G) Letter from the Chair of the North Hertfordshire Interfaith Forum