

Institution: The Open University

Unit of Assessment: D29 English Language and Literature

Title of case study: Transforming public awareness of South Asian contributions to Britain, 1858-1950.

1. Summary of the impact

Research led by Susheila Nasta challenges the dominant perception that multicultural Britain is a post-Second World War phenomenon, and demonstrates that the early histories of South Asians in Britain are relevant to contemporary issues of British Asian and global citizenship. Built on partnerships with national and international collaborators, this research has reached and influenced large numbers of people through two major touring exhibitions (one in the UK, one in India), extensive online and broadcast dissemination, and direct engagement with policy-makers. In the process, this research has had a major impact in transforming public awareness of this integral element of Britain's past.

2. Underpinning research

The underpinning research led by Susheila Nasta is focused upon the literary, cultural and political contributions made by South Asians to Britain in the period 1858 to 1950. Nasta conducted this research as Reader at the Open University (OU) from 1999 and as Professor of Modern Literature at the OU from 2003. She has been a pioneering scholar in South Asian literature in Britain, playing a central role in both analysing the historical emergence of this literary tradition and in establishing its political relevance for contemporary Britain.

Nasta's leadership for 29 years as founding editor of *Wasafiri: The Magazine of International Contemporary Writing* has informed the conceptual base of this research project. In 1991 and 1995 she edited two formative issues, 'South Asian Writing' and 'South Asian Diaspora'. She organised the first UK conference on the topic (Queen Mary, 1994) and a further symposium with the OU Postcolonial Literatures research group in 2001. Her monograph, *Home Truths. Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain* (Palgrave, 2002), is the major reference point for all studies in the field. Nasta contributed as Trustee of South Asian Diaspora Literature and Arts Archive (SALIDAA) to building a post-1950 digital archive of South-Asian-British heritage. These interests converged in her 2007-2010 AHRC project 'Making Britain: South Asian Visions of Home and Abroad'. Led by Nasta (PI) in partnership with Oxford University and King's College London, the research team included two co-investigators and three postdoctoral research associates, two based at the OU (Ahmed: 2007-10; Stadler: 2008-13).

The research has excavated, collated and interpreted new archival evidence from Britain, India, Sri Lanka and the USA, and has in the process uncovered significant Asian-British networks and spheres of influence that cut across race, gender and class divides. The findings counter the prevalent amnesia that positions India's (pre-independence) history in Britain on the nation's margins, and underscores the crucial relevance of this research to ongoing contemporary debates on multiculturalism, British and Indian citizenship.

The underpinning research was always conceived with two audiences in mind: academic peers [see outputs 3.1-3.5] and non-academic audiences [see 3.6, as well as the outputs summarised in 4]. The latter commitment led to significant amounts of the underpinning research appearing in forms accessible to wide audiences, notably the first bio-bibliographical interactive database of early South Asian Britain (OU-hosted; linked to the BL; c. 500 entries: www.open.ac.uk/makingbritain); an eleven-panel touring exhibition (BL/OU; UK-tour); and a *Guardian* online timeline (www.guardian.co.uk/world/interactive/2011/sep/10/south-asians-making-britain).

The success of the 'Making Britain' project led to the OU (Nasta PI with Stadler) being awarded

follow-on funding by the AHRC (2011-12) for a public engagement grant to maximise impact and extend the reach of the research to more non-academic constituencies in Britain and India. This follow-on project, 'Beyond the Frame: Indian-British Connections', succeeded not only in its primary aim of making the findings of the 'Making Britain' project accessible to wider audiences [see 4], but also enabled Nasta and Stadler to undertake further primary research. The research associated with 'Beyond the Frame' has appeared in accessible forms in archive-based BL digital learning resources (www.bl.uk/asiansinbritain) and in Nasta and Stadler's *Asian Britain: A Photographic History* [3.5].

3. References to the research

Research outputs:

1. Nasta, S. (ed.) (2013) *India in Britain: South Asian Networks and Connections, 1858-1950*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013.
2. Nasta, S. (2011) 'Negotiating a "New World Order": Mulk Raj Anand as Public Intellectual at the Heart of Empire (1925-1945)' in Ahmed, R., Mukherjee, S. (eds), *South Asian Resistance in Britain 1870-1950*, London: Continuum, pp. 140-160.
3. Nasta, S., Boehmer, E., Visram, R., Ranasinha, R., Mukherjee, S., Ahmed, R., Stadler, F. (2010) OU database, 'Making Britain: How South Asians shaped the nation, 1870-1950' (c. 500 entries) www.open.ac.uk/makingbritain.
4. Nasta, S. (2008) 'Between Bloomsbury and Gandhi: The Publication and Reception History of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*', in Fraser, R. and Hammond, M. (eds), *Books Without Borders: Perspectives from South Asia*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 120-139.
5. Nasta, S., with Stadler, F. (2013) *Asian Britain: A Photographic History*, London: Westbourne Press.

Research Grants:

6. 2007-10. £291,000 awarded by AHRC to Nasta (PI) for a project entitled 'Making Britain: South Asian Visions of Home and Abroad'. Grant No: AH/E009859/1.
7. 2011-12. £121,000 awarded by AHRC to Nasta (PI) for a follow-on project: 'Beyond the Frame: Indian British Connections'. Grant No: AH/J003247/1.

4. Details of the impact

Social and cultural impact. The project's research led to two touring exhibitions 'South Asians Making Britain' (UK-tour 2010-12) and 'Beyond the Frame: India in Britain' (India-tour 2011-12). These exhibitions with outreach activities and online learning resources have helped to re-frame public and political perception in the UK and India of South Asian contributions to British life and culture before the Second World War. Both were built on successful collaborations with major organisations (the British Council (India), the British Museum, the National Archives of India, the South Bank Centre (London), and the Victoria and Albert Museum), and attracted large audiences, as well as extensive interest from the media and policy-makers.

The UK exhibition tour was premiered at 'Bharat Britain' (British Library conference 2010; 250 delegates). It visited 11 public libraries, 2010-12 (1-2 months/venue, coordinated by British Library): Barking, Birmingham, Bradford, Brighton, Croydon, Leicester, Manningham, Middlesbrough, Southall, Swiss Cottage, and Woking (11,000 visitors). The impact on equality and citizenship issues was reflected in visitor responses. Some highlighted how 'all peoples' have 'played their part in shaping history' (Manningham, 10/2011); others stressed how the 'legacy' of Asian Britain should promote 'mutual respect and understanding' (visitor book, Southall 09/2012). Indian ayah images prompted actress Meera Syal to consider their stories for a play (BL 2010). Recognition of the importance of this new angle on British history encouraged other display requests: DSC South Asian Literature Festival (600 visitors, 10/2010); Asia House (300 visitors, 05/2012); and Humboldt University, Berlin (January - March 2012).

Following the success of the UK exhibition tour, the India exhibition tour was proposed following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in Delhi between the UK and Indian governments (07/2010). The British Council (BC) requested a preview for arts, education and culture leaders,

and after meetings between the BC, OU, the BL and the National Archives of India (NAI), the BC proposed co-ordinating an India-wide tour. The impact of the eight-city Indian exhibition tour (November - February 2011-12, with 6325 visitors) was enhanced by the many dialogues it provoked across numerous constituencies (arts and culture events, school workshops with more than 450 children).

The project materials deepened impact, stimulating wide media coverage (20 articles, including major newspapers, *Times of India*, *The Hindu*, *Indian Express*, *Mint*, *DNA*, *Pioneer*, *Calcutta Telegraph*, *Week*) [5.5]. The display and accompanying events influenced cultural programming (BC, NAI), sparking curriculum debate about 'new ways of interpreting history' through examining 'Indian history in Britain' instead of 'studying British history in India' (Feedback forms 22/02/2012). School workshops (15-18 year-olds) were linked to BC's 'Connecting Classrooms' scheme; NAI held a Delhi launch (11/2011), coordinating a separate museum-led tour to their Puducherry, Bhopal and Jaipur archive-centres (August – September 2012) with outreach modeled on the OU/BL materials (600 participants).

The project supported by PR consultants achieved wide media coverage and provoked further cultural interest. The 'Bharat Britain' conference led to a BBC broadcast on poets Tagore and Naidu (Radio 4, 7/11/2010). The UK exhibition prompted the image-based timeline, 'South Asians Making Britain' (09/2010) for *Guardian Online* on front and world news webpages (13,603 visits/month September – December 2010). BBC Three Counties Radio covered the OU exhibition launch (2012). High profile national institutions (Southbank Centre, 'Asian Bloomsbury', 07/2012 and Asia House, 'Radical South Asians', 10/2012) extended understanding (*Fiction Uncovered* podcast/Winkball <http://www.winkball.com/walls/9pYhqIsbhs/london-literature-festival-day-two-southbank>).

Knowledge transfer and exchange. Curatorial, academic and pedagogic collaborations with Indian and British stakeholders in the arts, cultural and museum sectors resulted in innovative international programming, showcasing UK humanities research through jointly-created materials, including entries on Asians in British History on the BL's award-winning interactive online timeline (5500 unique visits/month; <http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/timeline/accessvers/index.html>). A new Asians in Britain learning website [5.2] coinciding with the India tour (11/2011) attracted 15,445 individual page views by 09/2012. This cross-institutional engagement widened participation consolidating the AHRC/BL India strategies [5.3, 5.4]. Hasan (Director, NAI) observed 'Important cross-sector exchange has been established' (Delhi, 11/2011). Jensen (BL Head of Arts and Humanities) noted: 'how much more can be achieved when academics and library staff pool knowledge and expertise and share their network of contacts. This partnership has opened an important aspect of history to... the wider public, and provided invaluable opportunities for knowledge exchange between the OU and BL. Feedback from the UK, India and the Foreign Office suggests... this project has contributed significantly to community cohesion and cultural diplomacy' (10/2012).

Further online knowledge transfer has been ensured via the 'Making Britain' database (www.open.ac.uk/makingbritain), which hosts publicity materials, blogs and websites promoting this interactive freely-available resource (launched 2010). From 1864 unique visits/month (10/2011) to 11,389 (03/2013), traffic continues at 5,000-12,000 visits/month. Figures (03/2013) show that attention from UK (3735), India (3273) and the USA (1757) dominates, but it has attracted users from more than 46 countries. Statistics indicate Google as main referrer. Browsing patterns reveal diverse content searches demonstrating growing interest in the project's research.

Political impact. The strong OU/BL partnership generated wider political interest. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in London hosted the exhibition (November – December 2011), inviting the team to lead a FCO seminar on cultural diplomacy, thus recognising the project's significance to UK/India understanding. FCO analyst (Velmati) marked its relevance for Britain's diasporic communities; Wadvani, Deputy High Commissioner, Kolkata suggested the website/database be 'required reading for anyone joining the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's South Asia team' (2011).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Reports, reviews, web links or other sources of information in the public domain:

1. Review of 'Asians in Britain' website, Institute of Race Relations (Jan 2012):
<http://www.irr.org.uk/news/asians-in-britain/>
2. British Library Annual Reports 2010/11; 2011/12:
<http://www.bl.uk/aboutus/annrep/index.html>
3. AHRC 2011-12 Economic Impact report and 'UK and India' brochure:
<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/News-and-Events/News/Pages/Showcasing-UK-India-Research.aspx>; <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/News-and-Events/Publications/Documents/AHRC%20Impact%20Report%202012.pdf>;
<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/media/brief/impactcase/policy/Pages/nasta.aspx>;
4. India press coverage: Fernandez, J. R. (2011), 'Song of the immigrant', 3 December 2011, *Times of India*: <http://www.timescrest.com/culture/song-of-the-immigrant-6810>
5. UK press coverage: Parry, L. (2013) 'Real life East is East', 7 November 2013, *Mail Online*:
http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2490000/Fascinating-book-Asian-Britain-reveals-happened-UK-culture-east-met-west.html?ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490

Confidential reports or documents:

6. AHRC assessor reports on 'Making Britain' noting its timeliness, scope, conceptual breadth and 'value' (AHRC ID 111696, 112462); evaluated 'outstanding' by the AHRC in its final report (September 2011; Ref: AH/E009859/1).
7. Making Britain Database Web Statistics

Individual users/beneficiaries to be contacted by the REF team to corroborate claims:

8. Head of Arts and Humanities, British Library
9. Director Programmes India & Sri Lanka, British Council Division, British High Commission
10. Deputy High Commissioner Eastern India, British Deputy High Commission Kolkata