



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Research Programs Notice of Funding Opportunity at the appropriate resource page ([Awards for Faculty at Hispanic-Serving Institutions](#), [Awards for Faculty at Historically Black Colleges and Universities](#), [Awards for Faculty at Tribal Colleges and Universities](#)) for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Research Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

The application format may have been changed since this application was submitted. You must follow the guidelines in the currently posted Notice of Funding Opportunity (see above links).

Project Title: Women Writers and the Portrayal of Women in British Indian Fiction

Institution: Delaware State University

Project Director: Susmita Roye

Grant Program: Awards for Faculty at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

NARRATIVE

Mother(ing) India:

Pioneering Women Writers in British India Challenging Stereotypes

Reason for requesting for HBCU Faculty Award: I am applying for this award to be able to complete my book manuscript. Three out of the total six chapters of this manuscript have already been written. Two chapters and the Introduction remain to be completed. Extensive research has already been conducted for the two chapters but I need time to write them. With the help of this award, I shall be able to complete the book.

Aim of this proposed project: This book project will concentrate on early Indian women's fiction, evaluating their contribution to the rise of Indian Writing in English (IWE) and how they reassessed and challenged stereotypes about Indian womanhood. Among other questions, in the late 19th century, when India was only forming a vague idea of her nationhood and was getting increasingly portrayed in terms of femaleness (via the figure of an enchained "Mother India"), what role did women and their literary endeavors play in shaping both their nation and their femininity/feminism? How and how far did these pioneering authors use fiction as a tool of protest against and resistance to the Raj and/or patriarchy, and in expressing gender-based solidarity? How do they view and review the stereotypes about their fellow-women, and thereby 'mother' India by redefining her image?

Structure of the book: Chapter 1 – Introduction; Chapter 2 – Child-Wife; Chapter 3 – Purdahnashin (draft completed); Chapter 4 – Suttee (draft completed); Chapter 5 – Widow (draft completed); Chapter 6 – New Woman (draft partially completed).

The chapters in the book: My book explores the manner in which colonial Indian women writers respond to how Indian women are stereotyped by both the Indian patriarchy and British rulers. Each of the chapter (except for the Introduction) takes one stereotype and shows how these colonized writers challenge them.

Chapter 1: (to be completed) The introductory chapter will draw attention to the role and contribution of these pioneering women writers to IWE. It will place the work of women writers in the context of the birth and rise of IWE in pre-independence India. It will also draw attention to the general conditions of women from different parts of colonial India to focus on the politics of representation that gave rise to stereotypes about them. This chapter will also make the connection between the stereotypes that are highlighted in this book and the concept of "mother(ing) India" – achieved by defying as well as re-defining the politically charged figure of Mother India – in the fiction of these women writers.

Chapter 2: (to be completed) This chapter on 'Child-Wife' focuses on the stereotype that the tradition of child marriage in India had caused to create. Especially at the turn of the 20th century, campaigns against child marriage by 'enlightened' Indians like Pandita Ramabai, Justice Ranade, and Jotirao Phule, among others, helped to bring this issue more to the attention of the world. The infamous incidents of two child-wives – Rukhmabai (a child-wife who refused to go back to her husband once she grew up and this caused a huge uproar in 1880) and Phulmonee (a child-wife who was raped by her own adult husband in 1889 and she finally died) – forced this issue to become a priority for the British government to fight against. The child-wife became the 'political football' played between the two contending groups of the Raj loyalists and the nationalists. So, what did the women writers have to say about this stereotype and the fight over their right and age to marry? How did they depict the stereotype of the child-wife in their writings? What was their politics of representation in doing so? In an attempt to understand this, this chapter will delve into the writings by Shevantibai Nikambe, Cornelia Sorabji, M.P. Seelavathi Amma and Krupabai Sathhianadhan to see how they depict the child-wife, her trials and tribulations. In doing so, what message do they want to get across? Do they take a side in the political debate?

Roye(Narrative): 1/3

Chapter 3: This chapter deals with the stereotype of the Purdahnashin, a lady who observes purdah and lives the life of seclusion. More than one writer has been analyzed in this chapter to throw light on different perspectives, two of them being a utopian vision and a sociological approach. The portion of this chapter on Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* has already been published in *Kunapipi* in 2009. The portion on Iqbalunnissa Hussain's *Purdah and Polygamy* is now submitted to another peer-reviewed journal.

Chapter 4: This chapter is on Suttee, the rite of self-immolation of a widow on her dead husband's pyre to prove her wifely devotion. Sorabji's sarcastic subversion of this cruel rite is analyzed and is juxtaposed with Sathianadhan's version. I also challenge the definition of suttee only as the rite and instead present the real meaning of the word, as seen lurking in the latter's work. It was published in the peer-reviewed journal, *South Asia Research* (2011).

Chapter 5: This chapter shows how women writers like Sorabji, Dadabai, Nalini Turkhud and Nikambe depict the conditions and treatment of widows in their society. It also refers to Pandita Ramabai's criticism of the social injustice showered upon widows in her famous book on the high-caste Hindu woman. In their depiction, I argue, one may detect a critique of both their own menfolk and the British Raj, in an attempt to create a space of their own.

Chapter 6: (to be completed) The concluding chapter on New Woman focuses on perhaps the most debated figure in nationalist India. The rulers claimed that they needed to stay on in India to care for the deprived women of India and to give them opportunities and freedoms to construct the 'New Woman'. The nationalists in India, however, refused to give that honor to the British. In this chapter, I discuss how women-writers like K.S. and Mrs. C.T. Ramabai portray the New Woman in their works: 'Sarala's Choice' and *Ratna* respectively. On the one hand, they challenge the assumption that the educated Indian women need to follow in the footsteps of the enlightened memsahibs (white women in British India); they point out the manners in which the Indian woman may not and should not become the shadow of the memsahib but instead maintain her own unique identity. On the other hand, they refuse to blindly follow the diktat of the Indian patriarchy as to how strong but submissive their womenfolk should be; these writers, now ignored and forgotten, instead dared women to pave a path of their own, balancing tradition and modernity, combining the best of the East and the West. New womanhood esp. redefines the image of 'Mother India'.

Extant critical material: In the last decade or so, we witness a growing interest in these long-neglected writers in the works of Chandani Lokugé, Meenakshi Mukherjee, Eunice De Souza, Antoinette Burton, Teresa Hubel, to name a few. The diverse angles taken by the critics are: biographies of authors (Gooptu), collection of miscellaneous writings by an author and her family (De Souza), monographs on historical figures like Rukhmabai (Chandra), depiction of Indian nationalism in women's writings (Hubel), early Indian feminists (Bharati Ray), woman and nation/hood (Sangeeta Ray), lost voices (Lokugé), etc.

My novel contribution: Given the paucity of space here, I shall very briefly discuss only a few of the above-mentioned critics and their contributions, to put my fresh angle of analysis into context. Bharati Ray discusses Sakhawat Hossain and her role as a pioneering Muslim feminist in South Asia but that takes mainly a historical approach. There is very little critical literary analysis of the novella, and that is given detailed attention to in my work to present it as more than mere propaganda. Sangeeta Ray devotes a part of one of her chapters in her book to analyzing the "Nation of women" portrayed in Sakhawat Hossain's novella. While her focus is more on the feminist utopia that is created in this women's world, mine is to assess the multiple layers of Hossain's gaze as a triply marginalized author (colonized + purdahnashin + woman). Teresa Hubel devotes an entire chapter in her book to show how the high-caste Hindu woman becomes a "site for contest" between imperialists and nationalists. So, what about the other 'sites for contest' engendered by the tensions between

the two warring camps? My work addresses that gap. Inspired by and adding on to the work already done, I want to arrest attention on three main themes: 'mothers' of IWE, how they refute Katherine Mayo's book, *Mother India* and how they 'mother' India via contesting the politically motivated, often male-generated stereotypes. Furthermore, *none* of the above-mentioned critics and scholars has devoted an *entire* book to the critical literary analysis of early IWE women writers (particularly, their fiction), and that is long overdue. My book will address this yawning absence by not only pointing out that IWE was not born of 'fathers' (the Anand-Rao-Narayan trinity) alone, but also by discussing, among other things, how the 'mothers' of IWE mothered India in and through their works. So far, there is only *one* book by Smriti Singh devoted to the writings of only *one* pioneering author, Krupabai Sathianadhan. Many other major works on early Indian Women Writing in English focus exclusively on Toru Dutt, the poetess. In contrast, every major IWE woman writer of fiction in pre-independence India will be discussed in my study. Not only will I focus on the better-known names like Sathianadhan, Sorabji, Nikambe and Hussain, but I shall also be drawing attention to the unheard-of women writers like 'KS', Turkhud, Radha, Ramabai and Dadabai. This in itself, to the best of my knowledge, is an original approach to this body of literature of archival significance, and such a book as proposed by this project, it is sincerely believed, will make information about them accessible to a vast readership, thereby arousing more interest in the field and eventually inspiring more in-depth studies of these early works. Furthermore, this book is making a pioneering effort in examining how the observed – that is, the colonized Indian woman – observes back and counters the politics of stereotyping. Given the sparse (almost non-existent!) critical oeuvre on early IWE women writers, this book, once completed, will make groundbreaking contribution to the field.

Time frame and Work plan: 01/13/2014 – 01/12/2015; 9 months (during the two semesters of teaching) = half-time; 3 months (during the summer break when there is no teaching load) = full-time. A major portion of the reading has already been done. Therefore the time during the stipend will be mainly utilized for writing in the following manner: Spring semester (half-time) = research for and write the chapter on New Woman; Summer Break (full-time) = research for and write the chapter on Child-Wife; Fall semester (half-time) = research for and write the Introduction.

Access to resources: I do not need wide-ranging travels to complete this book because I have already done extensive research in Oxford Bodleian Library and in the archives of British Library in London, UK. I shall use the outstanding online resources and the system for Inter-Library Loans in the nearby rich libraries of Delaware State University, University of Delaware, University of Pennsylvania, Rutgers University and Georgetown University.

Competencies and skills: Indian Women's Writings in English is one of my major areas of research and expertise. My doctoral dissertation, which explored the relationship between the colonizer-colonized women, heavily focused on early IWE women writers. The inspiration for the present project springs from that research work. I am competent to write this proposed book because: (i) I have done research, widely presented and published papers in this and/or related field, (ii) I teach a few of these authors in my Women Studies courses, (iii) my own similar national and cultural background is a major advantage.

Final product and Target readership: The final product of this yearlong intensive research writing will be a book. I shall submit it to Oxford University Press (OUP) for consideration for publication. OUP has already published an 'Oxford Classic Reissue' series of works by these early women writers and may be interested in publishing critical analysis of these works. This proposed book targets academicians and researchers from diverse disciplines with an interest in Indian Writing in English, Women and South Asia, Gender Studies, Indian Women Writers, Roots/kinds of Indian Nationalism and Feminism, South Asian Cultural Studies, Gender and Imperialism, and Post/Colonial Studies.

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