

26 January 2015

Dear RSVP Board Members,

I am writing to report on the progress of my research project, “‘Our Indian Sisters’: Victorian women’s magazines and the woman’s magazine in early 20th century India’, which was generously supported by the Curran Fellowship in 2014.

My aim was to examine the links between women’s magazines in imperial Britain and colonial India, through a close analysis of a group of Hindi and English magazines published in India between 1901 and 1914. I wanted to trace the multiple ways in which women’s magazines in Britain and India spoke to each other, referenced each other, and tried to establish transnational networks of affinity. I was particularly interested in the debates about women’s work that the Indian publications actively participated in. Since most of my research so far had been located in the British Library, the Curran Fellowship allowed me to significantly expand my archival base by funding an extended trip to India. I spent three months in Delhi, interspersed with two short trips to Chennai and Mumbai. My primary material was located in the Nehru Memorial Library in New Delhi, though I also looked through the Hindi collections at the Marwari Library in old Delhi. While my visit to the Tamil Nadu State Library (Chennai) was challenging in some ways, the time I spent at the Roja Muthiah Research Library (Chennai) and the Sound and Picture Archives for Research on Women (SPARROW) (Mumbai) proved to be remarkably productive and inspiring.

The last decades of the nineteenth century saw an emerging feminist consciousness in India that was closely linked with a number of women-led movements and organisations, as well as women’s increasingly visible role in the independence movement. Women’s magazines were central to the articulation of these new identities and voices. Though women’s magazines existed in India in the latter half of the nineteenth century, these were few and far-between; only at the beginning of the twentieth century did women’s magazines begin to emerge as an important and viable part of popular print culture. Concentrating on their writings on women’s selfhood, education and work, my research addressed three key questions: 1) How do Indian women’s magazines at the beginning of the twentieth century show a sense of shared experience as well as a feminist consciousness? 2) How do these magazines respond to the idiom and format of British women’s magazines (including missionary magazines), putting it to use in expressing a new and hybrid identity and expression? 3) How do they reflect upon British women in India, as well as Englishness in the context of the Indian nationalist movement?

In order to answer these questions, I needed to examine a range of different magazines from the period and consider how they related to each other and put forward their own singularity in a highly charged political and literary milieu. I succeeded in locating and surveying several of the magazines that I had already identified while also encountering some that were entirely unfamiliar to me. I chose to focus on two magazines in particular: *Bharat Bhagini* in Hindi and *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine* in English. The length of my stay in Delhi made it possible for me to read carefully these publications, and get a sense of their relationships to larger networks of print culture as well as their own internal developments. Archival work unearths all kinds of surprises and my discoveries were significant in shaping the path my research will take. I was especially taken aback by the cosmopolitanism these publications exhibited, and the connections they had with magazines and editors not only in India but also in other parts of the empire. This was particularly the case for *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine* and its editor Kamala Sathianadhan, who is

now almost forgotten but comes across as a woman of extraordinary energy and enthusiasm. On the other hand, my experience of the Tamil Nadu State Library was less fruitful because of the disarray of the catalogues and stacks. While I did not find there what I was looking for, I did stumble across another publication, the *Madras Christian College Magazine*, which I had abandoned all hope of finding after the college (which still exists) did not allow me to access its own archive. I also chanced upon some school magazines, however, I came across these only on the last day of my trip and hope to go back in the next couple of years to examine them more fully.

This fellowship was also an excellent opportunity for me, as an early career researcher, to not only undertake an extended period of archival research but also to establish links with Indian researchers and academics especially in Delhi University, where I presented a paper based on this research in early September. This research also led to invitations to present my research at the departments of Oriental Studies at Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan, and Jagiellonian University, Kraków (Poland) in October. I presented a paper based on this work at the annual conference of the North American Victorian Studies Association in November 2014 as well. Further, this research will result in two journal articles.

I deeply appreciate the financial support provided by the RSVP and the Curran Fellowship, which has given me enough material to keep me busy for several years to come and also significantly influenced the shape that my monograph arising from this material will take. I am equally thankful for the confidence the Curran Committee placed in this work, which I hope will make a significant contribution to studies of Victorian print culture and the empire.

Sincerely,
Tara Puri

Global Research Fellow
Institute of Advanced Study &
Department of English and Comparative
Literary Studies
University of Warwick

Email: T.Puri@warwick.ac.uk
Tel: 02476 574 423

**Department of English &
Comparative Literary Studies**
The University of Warwick
Coventry CV4 7AL United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0) 24 7652 4928
Fax: +44 (0) 24 7652 4750
Email: t.m.williams@warwick.ac.uk