

**Application to the College of Liberal Arts Faculty Research, Scholarship,
and Creative Activity Grant Program, 2011**
Alpana Sharma
Department of English

Project Narrative

Plan:

I aim to edit a special issue of the literary journal *South Asian Review* on the topic of South Asian modernism. The editor and the editorial board have approved my proposal for the special issue and have agreed to publish the issue provided I meet the subvention funds for publication, which amount to \$3,500. Hence, I would like to request \$3,500 to cover the publication costs of this special issue. (The editor's letter indicating approval is attached to this application.)

South Asian Review is the refereed journal of the South Asian Literary Association, an allied organization of the Modern Language Association. It aims to create an international forum for the study of South Asian languages and literatures and is read not only within South Asian studies but also by scholars and readers in post-colonial studies, cultural studies, comparative literature, women's studies, film studies, South Asian diasporic literature, and transcultural studies.

Rationale:

The special issue will be titled Modernism in South Asian Literature. As a topic, modernism in South Asian literature is both timely and compelling. The received wisdom on modernism is that it was the greatest artistic experiment of the early 20th century. In literary studies, the profound impact of modernism was such that literature went from providing a fixed point of reference for a culture to forming a domain of

active experimentation, a site upon which writers exploded notions of unity, chronology, and self-coherence. A relatively unexplored and neglected area of research involves the profound influence of European modernism on South Asian colonial and post-colonial writers. Indeed, we are at a critical juncture where we must simultaneously acknowledge two facts: first, that three generations of westernized, highly educated colonial and post-colonial writers have reproduced, in some ways, the elitist nature of the modernist movement itself (“high modernism”), and second, that said elitism has not neutralized modernism’s inherent tendency to fragment and destabilize any unitary claims to truth, *including the Truth of Empire*. One may even say, on a careful reading of the early novels of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Attia Hossain, and others, that modernism is the natural idiom of those writers in so far as it provided them with a sharp-edged tool with which to chip away at the edifice of colonialism. As such, this special issue agrees with Elleke Boehmer, who writes in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, that “modernism as a body of discursive practices was not simply imposed on the Empire in the form of colonial trends or school curricula. We see in modernism signs of colonial writers critically engaging with the writing of the centre—its surrealism, its fragmentary forms. They appropriated its influences selectively, interpreting these to match their own experience.” As yet, no study has been done of the nature of this selective appropriation of modernism by South Asians. Hence, the special issue asks interested contributors to address how and why modernism compelled the first generation of South Asian writers; what kinds of experimentation they undertook; what their legacy is for contemporary writers; whether modernist experimentation was going on in languages other than English; what new theories of

South Asian modernism might be advanced, given its subversive, transgressive, and interventionist potential, and so on.

My own article for the journal comes out of my ongoing longer project on South Asian women writers. I propose to write an essay on contemporary Indian novelist Shashi Deshpande, a well known author in South Asia who deserves wider recognition in North America. A draft of this essay was presented at the Mid-Western Modern Language Association conference in 2008, in which I examined Deshpande's writings for their modernist conception and treatment of time, propensity for hybrid referencing, and the foregrounding of female narrators who are themselves writers or artists. Extensively revising this essay entails closer reading of primary texts and wider and deeper reading of secondary texts (scholarly work on the author and on the topic of modernism). Ideally, I would like to demonstrate that the author is not simply copying the idioms of modernism but, instead, actively engaging the terms of modernism to produce a new and distinctively Indian concept of the human subject.

Outcome:

The outcome of this project is the publication in 2012 of a special issue of *South Asian Review* that invites South Asian and post-colonial scholars to revisit the past in order to more meaningfully reassess the present, to formulate a historically informed critique of South Asian literature that moves us beyond reductive binaries such as South Asian/Western, colonial/post-colonial, modern/postmodern. To readers outside these fields, it helps correct a Eurocentric bias in providing a critical understanding of the diverse possibilities of a globally conceived modernism.

CURRICULUM VITAE

ALPANA SHARMA

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- **EDUCATION**

1984-1990 Ph.D., Critical and Cultural Studies/English, University of Pittsburgh.

1982-1984 M.A., English, Pennsylvania State University.

- **ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT**

Sept. 2000- Associate Professor of English, Wright State University

1996-2000 Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

1993-1996 Assistant Professor of English, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

- **SELECTED PUBLICATIONS**

BOOKS:

Editor, *New Immigrant Literatures in the United States: A Sourcebook to Our Multicultural Literary Heritage* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996). Under Alpana Sharma Knippling. 386pp.

ARTICLES:

“*Slumdog Millionaire*: The Film, the Reception, the Book, the Global,” accepted for publication by *Literature/Film Quarterly*; forthcoming. (Refereed)

“Paradise Lost in *Mission Kashmir*: Global Terrorism, Local Insurgencies, and the Question of Kashmir in Indian Cinema,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 25.2 (2008): 124-131. (Refereed)

- "In-Between Modernity: Toru Dutt (1856-1877) from a Postcolonial Perspective," *Women's "Experience" of Modernity, 1875-1945*, ed. A. Ardis and L. Lewis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2003). 97-110. (Refereed)
- "Towards a Pedagogy of Counterculture/Countering Culture: Globalization and the Case of Asian American Literature," *Learning from Seattle*, ed. I. Szeman, Spec. Issue of *Review of Education/Pedagogy/Cultural Studies* 24.1/2 (2002): 77-89. (Refereed)
- "Body Matters: The Politics of Provocation in Mira Nair's Films," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 18.1 (2001): 91-103. (Refereed)
- "Sharp contrasts of all colours': The Legacy of Toru Dutt" in *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women's Texts*, ed. A. Amireh and L. S. Majaj (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 2000). 209-228. (Refereed)
- "Self (En)Gendered in Ideology: Pratibha Parmar's *Bhangra Jig* and *Sari Red*," *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society* 1.2 (Fall 1996): 119-124. (Refereed)
- "R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Modern English Discourse in Colonial India," *Literature of the Indian Subcontinent*, ed. A. Sagar. Spec. Issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* 39.1 (Spring 1993): 169-186. (Refereed)

- **GRANTS AND LEAVES**

- 2007-08 Professional Development Leave.
- 2002 International Curriculum Development Grant to develop course in African literature. \$1,500.

- **SELECTED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS**

- Jan. 2011 "Realism, the 'Cinema Effect,' and Anurag Kashyap's *Black Friday*," South Asian Literary Association Annual Conference, Los Angeles.
- Nov. 2010 "Romancing the Bomb: Muslim Men as Objects of Love and Subjects of Terror in Recent Bollywood Films," Mid-West Modern Language Association (M/MLA) Annual Conference, Chicago.
- Chair of Special Session, What Does the Terrorist Want? M/MLA, Chicago.
- Nov. 2008 "Post-Colonial Modernism and the Novels of Shahsi Deshpande," M/MLA, Minneapolis.

- Chair of Permanent Session on Multicultural Literature in the Classroom,
M/MLA, Minneapolis.
- Nov. 2007* Chair of Permanent Session on Multicultural Literature in the Classroom,
M/MLA, Cleveland.
- Nov. 2006* "Trauma and Healing in the African Context: *Maangamizi: The Ancient One*,"
M/MLA, Chicago, IL.
- Nov. 2005* "History and Feminist Storytelling in Shashi Deshpande's *A Matter of Time*,"
M/MLA, Milwaukee.
- June 2003* "Kashmir as Image in *Mission Kashmir: Paradise Lost?*" Cultural Studies
Association Conference, Pittsburgh.
- Oct. 2001* "Towards a Pedagogy of Counterculture/Countering Culture," Content
Providers of the World Unite! The Cultural Politics of Globalization, John
Douglas Taylor Conference, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario,
Canada.
- Feb. 2000* "Tradition and Modernity Revisited in the Films of Mira Nair, Deepa Mehta,
and Shekhar Kapur," 9th Annual British Commonwealth and Postcolonial
Studies Conference, Savannah.
- Dec. 1999* "'There's No Place Like Home': Nostalgia in a Transnational Frame,"
International Conference on Theory at the End of the Millennium, Udaipur,
India.
- 1998-1999* Participation in year-long national "Seminar on Japan" to develop curricula in
Japanese history and literature. Tokyo, Kurashiki, Hiroshima, and Kyoto,
Japan.

Budget

Subvention to cover publication costs

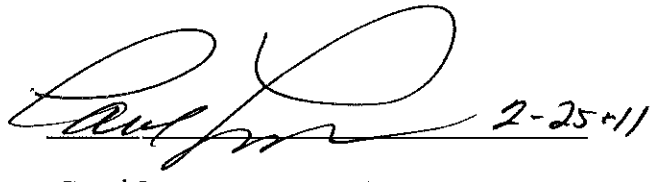
\$3,500

 2/25/11

Alpana Sharma

Date

Applicant

 2-25-11

Carol Loranger

Date

Chair, Department of English

Subject Re: spec. issue
 From Kamal Verma <kverma@piit.edu>
 Date Friday, October 15, 2010 4:04 pm
 To Alpana Sharma <alpana.sharma@wright.edu>

Dear Professor Sharma,

I am interested in your proposal for the 2011 Special Topic issue of the *South Asian Review*, Volume 32, Number 1. What will be the topic? Some of your observations are intellectually intriguing and challenging. I think the proposed issue on modernity can be a significant contribution to current scholarship on postcoloniality. But before we proceed any further I would like to make it clear that you need to secure subvention funds of \$3500 from your university, being the cost of publication of that issue of the *South Asian Review*, Volume 32, Number 1. Once I get the final word from you about funding, I will send you a formal invitation to guestedit the 2011 Special Topic issue. I would also need from you a Call for Papers that can go into the SAR, 31.1 and 31.2.

I did receive Professor Amritjit Singh's email about you and we have added your name to the list of adjudicators. You can expect to receive papers from us.

With best wishes.

Sincerely,

K. D. Verma
 Editor, SAR

On 10/11/2010 4:48 PM, Alpana Sharma wrote:

11 Oct. 2010

Dear Professor Verma,

Professor Amritjit Singh thought you might be interested in my idea for a special issue of *South Asian Review*. He forwarded you my email back in July and also said I would be willing to serve as a reviewer for essays submitted to the journal (which I'm happy to do).

What follows is my current thinking on the topic for this special issue. Please let me know what you think of it, and thanks you very much for your time!

I propose a special issue of *South Asian Review* that focuses on the topic of modernism in South Asian literature. Modernism, the European movement that swept aside all earlier verities and idealized views of the arts, shook the foundations of Western civilization. And, from having once provided a fixed point of reference for a given culture, literature became a domain of active experimentation, a site upon which writers exploded notions of unity and self-coherence. A relatively unexplored and neglected area of research involves the profound influence of European modernism on South Asian colonial and post-colonial writers. Indeed, we are at a critical juncture where we must simultaneously acknowledge two facts: first, that three generations of westernized, highly educated colonial and post-colonial writers have reproduced, in some ways, the elitist nature of the modernist movement itself ("high modernism"), and second, that said elitism has not yet neutralized modernism's inherent tendency to fragment and destabilize any unitary claims to truth, including the Truth of Empire. One may even say, on a careful reading of the early novels of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, and Attia Hossain, that modernism is the natural idiom of those writers in so far as it has provided them with a sharp-edged tool with which to chip away at the edifice of colonialism. As Elleke Boehmer writes in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, "The point . . . is not simply to assert that colonials were precursor modernists. It is rather to recognize that aspects of colonized and colonial expatriate reality were distinctly, perhaps in some cases even distinctively modernist. It is also to observe that modernism as a body of discursive practices was not simply imposed on the Empire in the form of colonial trends or school curricula. We see in modernism signs of colonial writers critically engaging with the writing of the centre—its surrealism, its fragmentary forms. They appropriated its influences selectively, interpreting these to match their own experience" (119).

And so we might ask: What means of experimentation and interrogation did modernism offer the first

generation of South Asian writers? Why does modernism continue to compel the collective imagination of such contemporary South Asian writers as Shashi Deshpande, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Manju Kapur (to name only two)? Might its forms and desires constitute an interrogatory ground upon which to critique the self-conscious parody-and-pastiche literary style of such postmodern writers as Salman Rushdie and Aravind Adiga? And what of those writers, such as Upmanyu Chatterjee, who fall between discourses of modernism and postmodernism?

In short, I propose a critical re-evaluation of South Asian literature in the context of modernism.

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