

<b>Institution: University of Leeds</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 29: English Language and Literature</b>
<b>Title of case study:</b> <i>Enabling Transnational Artistic Exchanges on Gender and Conflict in South Asia</i>
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)  <p>Ananya Kabir's pioneering research on how the visual arts in South Asia express trauma generated by conflict resulted in a major exhibition at Leeds and associated events nationwide, attracting over 130,000 visitors. Her focus on female artistic responses enabled long-term partnerships with South Asian cultural producers, whom she helped to connect with museums and galleries in the UK. Through both her research and direct involvement with impact, Kabir has facilitated transnational pathways of professional development whilst creating and interpreting South Asian cultural capital for British and South Asian heritage audiences.</p>
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)  <p>A member of the School from 2003-2013, Kabir began her research here by exploring the relationship between memorialisation of the Partition of India in 1947 and the resurgence of conflict in contemporary South Asia through right-wing and separatist movements. Her question was whether this resurgence was 'a return of the repressed.' Literary Studies had exposed Kabir to psychoanalysis-inflected analysis of cultural production around memory, particularly scholarship on Holocaust survivors' testimonies. Applying this scholarship to South Asian visual art to explore the connections between South Asia's foundational traumas and postcolonial conflict, she was able to provide fresh, non-Eurocentric understandings of South Asian collective trauma, in particular highlighting women's voices as alternative memorialisations of trauma [1].</p> <p>Throughout the 2000s in South Asia, radical activism against extremism flourished within the arts. To capture these developments, Kabir focused on visual and performance arts alongside literary texts. Using external funding awarded between 2004 and 2006 [2, 3], she produced a monograph on the Kashmir conflict in 2009 [4], in which she examined creative dialogues between Kashmiri and non-Kashmiri artists as a non-militaristic approach to a conflict zone. This research established the 'psychosocial' roots of conflict in South Asia and revealed colonial discourse as the link between violent postcolonial modernity and collective fantasy. In her book, Kabir argued for the philosophical necessity of the artist as visionary, who can use the ambivalences of artwork to challenge this interdependence of violence and fantasy and who can therefore offer new possibilities for working through collective trauma.</p> <p>Between 2005 and 2013 Kabir produced fifteen articles and a monograph on the subject of the Partition of India (for which she was awarded a British Academy Senior Research Fellowship), in which she extended these conclusions. Through this research Kabir identified the potential of applying this research model within art world contexts, posing the question: If artists from across South Asia were to come together in a neutral space to express themselves as subjects of conflict, what insights might emerge on conflict's genesis and resolution, and art's capacity to create post-conflict possibilities? Funding opportunities arising largely from Knowledge Exchange schemes [5, 6] allowed Kabir to realise her vision for a 'laboratory' of artistic dialogue.</p> <p>Through an AHRC Knowledge Transfer Fellowship (2007-10), Kabir worked with a curatorial team comprising Fareda Khan, deputy director of Shisha, a Manchester-based agency for South Asian crafts and arts, and Dr Daisy Hasan, a full-time postdoctoral researcher employed by the University of Leeds under the scheme for the same period. Under the project banner 'Between Kismet and Karma: South Asian Women Artists Respond to Conflict' (BKK), they brought cutting-edge work by women artists from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka to multiple British venues (2010). An initial exhibition in Leeds sparked a series of subsequent artist residencies, film screenings, performances and events that exposed British audiences to South Asian cultural products and</p>

encouraged dialogue between researchers, arts professionals and practitioners.

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

- 1) 'Gender, Memory, Trauma: Women's Novels on the Partition of India,' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25:1 (2005): 177-90. Reprinted in *Modern Indian Culture and Society: Critical Concepts in Asian Studies*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen, Routledge, 2009, Vol I: Identity. DOI: 10.1215/1089201X-25-1-177.
- 2) British Academy, January 2004, Small Research Grant, 'The Poetics of Dispossession: Literary Responses to Political Conflict in Indian Kashmir,' January 2004 (£3,870).
- 3) AHRC Grant for Research Leave in Semester 1, 2006-7 (£22,000; report awarded an A+).
- 4) *Territory of Desire: Representing the Valley of Kashmir* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009; Permanent Black, Delhi, 2009). Shortlisted for the 2010 European Society for Studies in English Prize. Available on request.
- 5) British Academy Small Research Grant, 'Visualising Partition: Remembering the Partition of India through the Visual Arts,' April 2007 (£6,400).
- 6) AHRC Knowledge Transfer Fellowship 'Home, Nation, Body: South Asian Women Artists Respond to Conflict,' October 2007, November 2007- January 2010 (£169,000). Awarded in first round of KT applications.

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

The BKK project combined Kabir's research with Fareda Khan's interest in exhibiting art arising from conflict through the lens of gender. This dynamic curatorial dialogue formed the basis for collaborations with a number of UK museums and galleries, which in turn prompted the invitation of the following ten South Asian artists, to make and exhibit work, and participate in events: Priya Sen, Shilpa Gupta (India); Naiza Khan, Sadia Salim (Pakistan); Yasmine Kabir, Tayeba Begum Lipi (Bangladesh); Sujeewa Kumari, Anoli Perera (Sri Lanka); and the film-makers Paromita Vohra (India) and Sabiha Sumar (Pakistan).

The principal event, the exhibition entitled 'Between Kismet and Karma', held at the Leeds City Art Gallery from March to June 2010, exposed British audiences (85,340 visitors [recorded in C]) to new work by contemporary South Asian artists. The impact of the exhibition and its planning rippled outwards to further collaborations and audiences through a number of related projects:

- Artistic residencies during the period of January-July 2010 placed Sen at the Gasworks, London and Kumari at Wolverhampton Art Gallery (27,436 visitors [recorded in C]).
- Supported by the British Council in Pakistan, an exchange scheme in February and May 2010 enabled Salim to take up a residency at the Bluecoat, Liverpool, while Liverpool artist Lin Holland visited the Indus Valley School of Arts, Karachi, resulting in a collaborative photographic installation (16,857 visitors [recorded in C]).
- Cornerhouse, Manchester's international centre for contemporary visual arts and independent film, showcased documentaries by Vohra, Y. Kabir and Sumar (May 2010), followed by a panel discussion (150 estimated visitors [recorded in C]).
- A symposium *Beyond Borders* at Leeds City Museum (March 2010) brought together the artists, writers and museums and galleries personnel. Tamil-Malaysian-British dramaturge Rani Moorthy delivered the keynote performance.
- At the invitation of Dame Jude Kelly, Moorthy, Holland and Salim presented as part of the Alchemy Festival of South Asian Culture at London's Southbank Centre (April 2010).
- In response to the exhibition, Yorkshire-based dance group Manasamitra created the performance piece 'Mirror Images'. BKK's contribution to diversity was further confirmed when this was performed at Wakefield Cathedral in July 2010.

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

These transnational pathways in turn generated new professional opportunities for participants.

- Khan became a Board member of Moorthy's Rasa Productions in 2011.
- Moorthy performed at Alchemy 2012 at the Southbank Centre.
- *The To-Let House*, a first novel by Postdoctoral Research Assistant Hasan dealing with the research themes of conflict in northeast India, was launched by Khan to an international audience at Asia House, London, 2011; in the same year it was longlisted for the Man Asia Literary prize and shortlisted for the Hindu Best Fiction Award.
- Numerous creative and intellectual collaborations between symposium participants were recorded in essays comprising the journal special issue '*Beyond Borders*' (A).

The BKK project was discussed in media including the BBC, the *Times*, the *Observer*, *TLS*, *THES*, *South Asian Times* (full list collated in [C]). Impact affected the following key areas:

*UK-based museums and galleries*

The BKK team acted as specialist advisors for museum and gallery staff who were unfamiliar with contemporary South Asian art but interested in diversifying their programming expertise. Kabir's research revealed that South Asian women artists mobilise vernacular, elite and craft traditions to interrogate the psychological pressures of a society rife with contradictory patterns of exclusions and inclusions. Working closely with curatorial and programming staff at Leeds City Gallery, the BKK team identified ten female South Asian cultural producers whose practice innovatively reflected these mobilisations. The Learning and Access Officer at Leeds Museums and Galleries said that 'BKK presented the gallery with a special opportunity to exhibit work by South Asian artists deeply rooted in their own social and geographic contexts' [D].

Through their various collaborations with artists, venues were able to challenge widespread assumptions regarding South Asian culture's conservatism and extend their curatorial practice to respond to both South Asian and non-South Asian heritage audiences [B, C]. Venues have acknowledged the crucial role played by Kabir, Khan and Hasan in ensuring thematic and aesthetic coherence of their projects. The Exhibitions Curator at the Bluecoat noted 'the importance of Kabir's original scholarship to the project... in leveraging funding as well as informing [its] development' [E]. Further recognising the importance of the team's expertise, the Programme and Engagement Director at the Cornerhouse observed that their involvement was essential to the import and screening of films otherwise unavailable in the UK [F].

BKK also provided a model of inter-institutional and academic-artistic partnership/collaboration that several of the venues and museums recognised they could use in further collaborations. For some of the venues involved, BKK successfully showcased the explicit conjoining of 'theory and practice' in BKK [D]. For others it provided a new model of artistic exchange and of 'hub and spoke' (multiple venues, with BKK as centre) collaboration [E].

*Participating artists and individuals*

The South Asian artists felt that their creative practice was transformed by the brief of 'conflict' and new exhibition contexts, and they subsequently took their transformed themes and media back to their own countries. In Salim's words, BKK 'changed the way I work and the medium that I normally employ (ceramics). I created a cynical/critical response to the (then) latest developments in the city especially in context of its architectural spaces.' Exploring these ideas in her subsequent Masters thesis changed 'the direction of [her] work and inculcated a deeper dimension of enquiry through [her] art practice.' Moorthy said of her keynote performance at Leeds City Museum: 'It was the first time I'd experienced that level of artistic engagement; a platform for women to talk not only about geopolitical areas of conflict, but also to talk about their personal experiences in those areas.' Holland, the only non-South Asian artist participating in the project, commented that her time in Karachi increased her knowledge of contemporary Pakistani artists, which has influenced and enriched her own practice and teaching, and that both she and Salim worked as a result in new mediums [G].

## Impact case study (REF3b)

*Communities and general audiences*

Each of the participating organisations developed education programmes, public talks and panel discussions that opened the culture of South Asian heritage communities to others and encouraged public understanding around the topic of the 'Asian woman' [A, B]. BKK enriched British cultural life by creating and interpreting artistic capital of South Asian heritage communities and helped generate awareness and appreciation amongst non-South Asian and South Asian audiences. Individual questionnaire responses record 'I didn't realize that there were so many (South Asian women artists)' and South Asian viewers expressed they could 'take pride in being South Asian' [recorded in C]. Collating feedback confirmed that the artworks challenged stereotypes about South Asian women and South Asian art circulating in both South Asian (18% of visitors) and non-South Asian heritage British audiences (50%). Of the total visitor figure for BKK (130,026), 97% of those returning feedback expressed interest in seeing future South Asian art exhibitions as a result of BKK and over 51% felt that their understanding of South Asian art had been altered by BKK [recorded in C].

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

- A) Ananya Jahanara Kabir, Fareda Khan and Daisy Hasan, eds., *Beyond Borders*, Special Issue of *South Asian Popular Culture*, Vol. 9, No. 1, April 2011, available on request.
- B) Fareda Khan, Daisy Hasan, Ananya Jahanara Kabir, eds, *Between Kismet and Karma Exhibition Catalogue* (Shisha Publications, 2011), available on request.
- C) Daisy Hasan, *Evaluative Report on Between Kismet and Karma* (report commissioned by Shisha, 2011), available on request.
- D) Learning and Access Officer, Leeds Museums and Galleries, testimonial, 24 August 2012, available on request.
- E) Exhibitions Curator, Bluecoat, Liverpool, testimonial, 22 August, 2012, available on request.
- F) Programme and Engagement Director, Cornerhouse, Manchester, testimonial, 23 August 2012, available on request.
- G) Testimonials of artists involved in BKK, August 2012, available on request.