

Institution: University of Bristol		
Unit of Assessment: 28) History		
Title of case study: Indian Suffragettes: Including BAME women in the history, commemoration and public discourse on suffrage		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015-2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Dr Sumita Mukherjee	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Associate Professor in Modern History	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 09/2016-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact

By diversifying, decentring, and globalising narratives about suffrage, Dr Mukherjee's research on 'Indian Suffragettes' has achieved profound cultural, educational and political impacts. It has challenged preconceptions, leading to the inclusion of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities in both histories of national commemoration, such as the inclusion of Indian women into plinths at Parliament Square, and public discourse. It has instigated new learning, thinking and action about race, empire and global approaches to suffrage histories, in cultural institutions campaign groups and the media, inspiring policymakers, parliamentarians and activists, as well as members of the public, especially BAME groups.

2. Underpinning research

Prior to Dr Mukherjee's research into Indian suffrage campaigners in the first half of the twentieth century, there was little public understanding of Indian suffragettes' involvement in the British suffragette movement, nor of their mobility and participation in transnational discourses. Mukherjee joined the University of Bristol in September 2016 as Lecturer in the History of Migration, having been awarded an AHRC Early Career Fellowship a year earlier. Her AHRC proposal received the highest possible rating (6) by the Peer Review College, marking it as 'an outstanding proposal that is world-leading in all of the following: scholarship, originality, quality, and significance'.

Research during this grant, and following, led to Mukherjee's monograph *Indian Suffragettes: Female Identities and Transnational Networks* [3.1], which used a combination of historical and geographical methodologies and archives in Australia, India, Switzerland, the US, the UK and Ireland. *Indian Suffragettes* emphasises the vibrancy of the Indian suffrage movement in the early twentieth century. Mukherjee's research shows that Indian 'suffragettes' were not only actively involved in campaigns within the Indian subcontinent; they also travelled to Britain, the US, Europe, and elsewhere, taking part in transnational discourses on feminism, democracy, and suffrage. Significantly, the monograph highlights the ways in which Indian women travelled globally at a time when they were colonial subjects. It also reveals the ways in which Indian women were involved in the British suffrage movement before 1918. Further work [3.2] has demonstrated the enduring impact of the internationalist suffrage movement in the inter-war period, and how it fed into the pan-Asian feminist movement.

This research has made two major contributions to public understandings of suffrage history. First, it emphasises the global connections of the suffrage movement, especially the connections between the British and Indian suffrage movements, showing that the campaigns for British female suffrage were not unique nor alone. Second, it brings to light the experiences of women from BAME backgrounds and their relationship with the British suffrage movement, highlighting that, although a small number of Indian women were involved, many women of colour were excluded from the British suffrage movement. In doing so, it draws attention to the ways in which

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race and empire were fundamental issues that British suffrage campaigners were engaging with, while also showing the ways in which the movement was more diverse than previously imagined.

3. References to the research

Publications

3.1 Monograph: **Mukherjee S** (2018), *Indian Suffragettes: Female Identities and Transnational Networks*, Oxford University Press, [listed in REF2] [Available on request]

3.2 Journal Article: **Mukherjee S** (2017). The All-Asian Women's Conference 1931: Indian women and their leadership of a pan-Asian feminist organisation, *Women's History Review*, **26.3**, pp.363-81, 9,800 words, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2016.1163924>

Funding

Mukherjee S (PI), *Indian Suffragettes: Networks, Transnationalism and International Feminism, 1918-1950*, AHRC Early Career Leadership Fellowship [AH/M004236/1](#) and [AH/M004236/2](#), April 2015-March 2017, GBP145,583 FEC (GBP116,466 awarded to King's College London, April 2015-August 2016; GBP25,030 awarded to University of Bristol, September 2016-March 2017)

4. Details of the impact

Mukherjee's research and publications on Indian Suffragettes [3.1, 3.2] have radically reframed understanding of the history of female suffrage in the UK, shattering received ideas to allow the inclusion of BAME women in national histories and public commemorations. In particular, her research had a profound political, cultural and educational impact on the national commemoration in 2018 of the centenary of the Representation of the People Act. Suffrage histories, with their focus on key individuals such as Millicent Fawcett and the Pankhursts, have tended to centre on traditional narratives of women's progress through a white Anglo-centric lens. Collaborating with Mukherjee, and drawing on her research, allowed the media, museums and charities to diversify the stories they told to include Black and Asian history and to connect the British suffrage movement with global histories. Crucially for all these organisations, this allowed them to present suffrage histories in a way that was relevant to BAME communities, attracted new audiences, and connected the centenary to current social and political issues. BAME audience members and readers saw their history reflected in a national commemorative moment, were invited into and included in new spaces, and were engaged and inspired to carry out their own research. The centenary has also left a lasting legacy in the form of a material memorial which – thanks to Mukherjee's research and advocacy – includes BAME women in the suffrage movement. The impact of Mukherjee's research continues to resonate in policy outcomes, ongoing work with the Fawcett Society, and a major exhibition at the British Library.

Inclusion of BAME women on a major new national monument

Mukherjee's impact on the centenary and its commemoration of the suffrage movement began in 2016. She advised the committee that campaigned for a public statue of Millicent Fawcett in Parliament Square, that was unveiled by the Prime Minister and Mayor of London in April 2018. Mukherjee's input led to the images and names of two women of Indian origin (Sophia Duleep Singh; Lolita Roy) on the plinth, the only two non-white figures [5.8]. Professor Gottlieb, the lead historical consultant working with artist Gillian Wearing on deciding on the 59 figures to be included on the plinth, has stated "I approached Dr Mukherjee to put forward the names of at least two Indian women who deserved to be represented around the plinth. It was vital for the artist to represent the widest possible range of figures who contributed to the suffrage movement, across ethnic, religious, class, regional and gender lines. Dr Mukherjee's ground-breaking research and paradigm-shifting re-conceptualisation of Indian women and the suffrage is now represented on a national monument in Britain's premier civic space" [5.8].

New, engaged audiences for suffrage histories

During the course of the centenary year in 2018, Mukherjee was invited to speak at 10 public events in Bristol, Manchester and London, offering talks and engaging in panel discussions on

suffrage histories and its relationship to contemporary history teaching and feminist activities. She highlighted the role of BAME women in the suffrage movement in Britain and elsewhere, adding new historical insight into existing historical conversations. These events markedly increased public awareness of the need to diversify suffrage and women's histories. One attendee commented that "I found Dr Sumita Mukherjee's talk on Indian suffragettes particularly interesting and thought provoking...these talks left me wanting to know more about each subject" [5.10]. Audience figures at each event ranged from 40-150 and reached beyond traditional audiences for historical events: six events were specifically designed for BAME audiences. This included two public events for BAME communities in parliament, with an audience of c. 35 at each, and two fully booked events in Tower Hamlets (capacity 60). A public event at the LSE in May 2018 was recorded as the second most diverse audience they had that year [5.1].

Mukherjee's public events have encouraged BAME audiences to pursue further research and activities relating to Indian suffrage. An attendee at Tower Hamlets in September 2018 noted: "A fascinating and informative talk, will research more on this subject"; another remarked: "great evening learning about Indian suffragettes in the context of British society as well as global suffrage movement! So many things to research and think about!" [5.5]. The chair of the event, Julie Begum, Chair of the Swadhinata Trust, following Mukherjee's talk subsequently gave talks herself on 'Indian Suffragettes' in the East End of London in 2019, demonstrating the inspiration and learning she had taken from Mukherjee's research [5.6].

Mukherjee's research has particularly motivated young women from BAME backgrounds. A young woman of Parsee faith, Shazneen Munshi, was encouraged to write an article about the Zoroastrian All-Party Parliamentary Group event in September 2018, which was published in the Mumbai newspaper, *Jama Jamshed Weekly*, and *Asian Voice* in November 2018, the leading British magazine for Asian communities. Munshi described how inspiring the event was especially as a young Zoroastrian in the 'captivating surroundings' of parliament [5.7].

Inclusion of Black and Asian histories in the media coverage of the centenary

This impact on the diversity of public interest is demonstrated by the take-up of Mukherjee's research on Black and Asian suffrage histories across a wide range of both mainstream and more specialised media outlets. In February 2018, Mukherjee was interviewed by the *BBC*, *Time*, *Al Jazeera*, *Broadly*, and *Refinery29*. Mukherjee's work has been cited in other media outlets and social media as a result, such as on the Google Arts and Culture site. She was interviewed by two feminist podcasts (*Kicking the Kyriarchy* and *Vulva la Revolution*), after the producers had seen Mukherjee speak at public events and realised that these stories of Indian suffragettes were not being told elsewhere and, as one producer put it, "how skewed the British image of suffrage history is". She was also interviewed on the major American podcast 'Citations Needed' and the French Radio station RTE, revealing international interest in these histories [5.2]. Evidence of this ongoing interest is that Mukherjee's blog post on Indian suffrage for the parliamentary Vote 100 blog site was (as of Spring 2018) their most popular post in terms of numbers [5.3].

Contributing to the Fawcett Society's centenary strategy and progress towards their strategic goals

Mukherjee has collaborated extensively with the Fawcett Society, the UK's leading charity campaigning for gender equality and women's rights. The 2018 centenary was a major event for the Society, who wished to honour Millicent Fawcett, on whose legacy the organisation is built, while also reaching out to new BAME audiences and young people. The CEO of the Society explained that Mukherjee's advisory work was central to developing their strategy for the centenary: "Dr Mukherjee's work with the Fawcett Society has been vital especially during 2018 in opening up our activities to a wider, more ethnically diverse audience. As a Society, a priority for us is to develop programmes of events and campaigns that engage with BAME audiences. Dr Mukherjee's work and our conversations have been influential in this regard" [5.10].

Mukherjee has advised the Society, written blog posts, been invited to speak at various Fawcett events, and featured in their newsletters. In 2017, she helped the Society produce educational packs on suffrage histories, highlighting the role of BAME women in the movement, and helping the Society in their strategic mission to reach young people. Mukherjee's collaboration informed the Society's major national social media campaign in 2018, which acknowledged the ways in which suffrage celebrations needed to be more inclusive not only of British BAME women but also of women around the world. The CEO explained the impact of Mukherjee's contribution: Mukherjee's blog post 'has had 5453 readers and was the 5th most popular page on the Fawcett Society website over 2018 (placing it above our major campaign page on Equal Pay Day). 84% of the readers of this blog post were visiting the Fawcett website for the first time, so it served a really crucial role in introducing a new audience to us' [5.10]. She continues: "Dr Mukherjee's research and consultancy for the Fawcett Society has been instrumental in our strategic mission to reach out to more young people and BAME audiences. Her work has made us more conscious of the racial diversity within the suffrage movement, the ways in which a forward-looking campaigning charity can use history to inspire young people of all backgrounds, especially by looking beyond Britain and working with women around the world". Mukherjee continues to advise the Society on issues of British BAME histories and inclusion [5.10].

Influencing changes in policy and practice at the Government Equalities Office

In February 2018, Mukherjee organised a workshop, with History & Policy, in parliament for policy makers, parliamentarians, academics and activists (c.35 attendees) to consider ways of using suffrage histories from the Global South to inform policymaking on inclusion and representation. In responses to a questionnaire, attendees agreed that they had been encouraged to think about the policy implications of the suffrage movement and methods for campaigning for greater racial and gender diversity in the UK parliament [5.9]. Attendees indicated that they would plan follow-up activities, implement conversations into policy in their own organisations, and would take more account of race in future events. One attendee described the event as 'inspiring', that it helped to "challenge [their] preconceptions" and "valued the very helpful concrete questions linking past content to present controversies" [5.9].

Mukherjee's parliamentary workshop directly influenced policy making and programmes led by the Government Equalities Office (GEO). One attendee, the Head of Listening Platform Team at GEO, has applied the knowledge she gained to her work with women who face multiple barriers to achieving their potential. She said: "Following the suffrage centenary I went on to oversee a project which gave a grant to Bristol Women's Voice called 'The City Listening Project' and two other cities, which held forums for women from diverse backgrounds to speak about what they feel are barriers preventing them from reaching their potential. It was the contribution of event's like Sumita's that helped to develop my thinking about how we listen to voices that so often get sidelined" [5.11].

A more diverse history of the fight for women's rights at the British Library

The strength and significance of these impacts, as well as her expertise and profile, meant that Mukherjee was invited onto the advisory board for the major British Library exhibition 'Unfinished Business: The Fight for Women's Rights' which was due to open in April 2020 with an estimated 80,000 visitors to the exhibition generating over GBP1 million in ticket sales (GBP15 per ticket). However, the launch was postponed until October 2020 due to Covid-19, and with social distancing rules in place the visitor targets have been reduced to 7,000. Initially due to run until February 2021, the exhibition has been extended until August 2021 (Covid-permitting). In addition, the exhibition will be supported by a series of 50 events, touring exhibitions to 10 libraries across the UK, and by web resources (live since October 2020) aimed at secondary and university learning audiences. With Mukherjee's intervention, this exhibition focusing on women's rights in Britain includes a whole section relating to Indian suffragettes, and she has written a chapter for the accompanying exhibition book.

The lead curator at the British Library, explains: "As a result of Dr Mukherjee's advice and subject knowledge we have included a thematic strand of objects and stories which would otherwise have been omitted. In particular, Dr Mukherjee has pointed us towards and helped

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illuminate content about Indian women's activism and the complicated relationship between Indian women activists and white British women activists in the early part of the twentieth century. Dr Mukherjee's advice has contributed significantly to my being able to bring to light diverse histories which lie outside mainstream historical accounts. This is especially important because the exhibition is aiming to attract a large percentage of visitors from the 15-25 year old age bracket from diverse backgrounds – these audiences do not traditionally attend British Library exhibitions” [5.4].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 List of public talks (2018) and LSE Suffrage 18 Mid Term Engagement Report (2018)
- 5.2 Media interviews and press coverage (February 2018)
- 5.3 Vote 100 Blog interview with senior parliamentary archivist in Country Gentleman's Association magazine (Spring 2018)
- 5.4 Letter of support from Curator at British Library (September 2019); [Unfinished Business: The Fight For Women's Rights exhibition](#) (23rd October 2020 – 8th August 2021) and [web resources](#), [accessed 5 February 2021]
- 5.5 Feedback forms from Tower Hamlets event (September 2018); social media impressions (September 2018)
- 5.6 Julie Begum talk (March 2019)
- 5.7 Jama Jamshed (September 2018); Asian Voice (November 2018)
- 5.8 Endorsement from Caroline Criado-Perez, Campaign Director (April 2017) and Dr Julie Gottlieb (July 2017); Spark 21 briefing document (2016)
- 5.9 Feedback forms from parliamentary workshop (February 2018)
- 5.10 Letter of support from CEO of the Fawcett Society (January 2019)
- 5.11 Email from Government Equalities Office (October 2020)