

UNIVERSITY of PUGET SOUND

Est. 1888

Oct 9, 2011

Patrick Leary
President, RSVP
939 Ridge Court, #2
Evanston, IL60202

Dear Patrick,

I write to thank RSVP and the Curran Fellowship committee for supporting my project “Negotiating Empire from Within: The Anglo-Indian *Mofussilite*.” The fellowship provided crucial seed money which was augmented by my institution, allowing me to spend three weeks conducting research on the English-language Indian newspaper, *The Mofussilite*, at the British Library.

As with all archival work, I encountered surprises – not all pleasant – but also discovered new pathways opening up that I had not anticipated. The first positive – if quotidian – surprise was that the Asia and African Reading Room of the BL had, since I had last been there in 2008, purchased a new microfilm reader that permitted far higher magnification than the older ones from the 1970s; this machine also permitted far easier copying, a resource that turned out to be a boon (if an expense beyond what I had estimated). The better machine, ironically, slowed me down considerably – simply because I could see more and “browse” more than I had before when the eye-strain and smudged print was a factor in moving me along. My notes from this research trip are not only more voluminous, but also more wide-ranging.

The nastiest shock I received was when I requested the reel of *The Mofussilite* for the year 1857. This was the year the Indian “Mutiny” or Uprising occurred (the events started on May 10, 1857, to be precise) and it was the “goal” towards which my reading of the first week was working towards. When the reel arrived, I was dismayed to discover a card at the start of the year that read: “All copies of the paper from June to Oct missing.” While the BL is generally precise in notating such skipped or missing months/years in all their bibliographical entries, there was no mention of these crucial missing months in any of their entries (in short, the missing numbers were a surprise to the curators as well, who could offer no explanation as to why the missing months were not listed in either the paper or online entries).

The superb curator of Asian/African newspapers, Patrick Casey, immediately set to work attempting to track down the missing numbers, only to discover that there are no extant copies of them anywhere. Based on some preliminary research, drawn especially from Australian sources, Mr. Casey speculated that all copies of those months had been destroyed because “as it [the *Mofussilite*] carried anti-government reports, its file copies were destroyed” (email exchange). In effect, my research question now took a turn down this tributary: was the paper’s stance or coverage of the events of 1857 “anti-government”? Luckily, I had one month’s of the newspaper’s coverage of the seismic events and then, after a hiatus of four months, continued coverage through to the end of the year. My reading of May and Oct-Dec 1857 stories indicate nothing “anti-government” or even remotely critical of empire or the British in the coverage of events in the paper. Indeed, the newspaper’s accounts are all too familiar and read like all the other British papers’ reactions to Indian “perfidy.” Yet today, the paper – despite scant

evidence to support it – has developed a reputation as an “anti-empire” (re)source. I’m not entirely certain where this impression derives from, but I suspect that in part it comes from a pro- vs. anti-empire binary that has too often taken hold as a heuristic to describe colonial relations. One project that has developed out of my research this summer is to scrutinize *The Mofussilite’s* politics in the years before and after the Uprising of 1857 in an effort to develop an understand of the processes of carving a middle-ground position.

The second door opened by the missing issues is that I went back to more closely scrutinize numbers from 1848-56. Two significant events occurred in those years: (1) John Lang, the paper’s founding editor, stepped down as editor and agreed to represent an Indian, Jooteeprasad, who was defrauded by the East-India Company and brought suit against the company; and (2) the paper closely followed the Great Exhibition in London and commented extensively on its representation of India as expressed by the collection on view. Both events provide rich nuggets of material. *The Mofussilite’s* coverage of the trial is an exercise in tact, developing journalistic ethics, and forming coalitions with other like-minded English-language newspapers around the country. Meanwhile, the material on the Crystal Palace offers a fresh perspective on a well-known story, adding the voice of a marginalized European “local” who struggles to be heard in the metropolis (often with very little success).

Given the volumes of material I found on just these two leads, I have my hands full with data; my work in the coming year will consist of processing this data and developing my arguments. I anticipate at least one to two articles emerging from this research trip.

I am grateful to RSVP and the Curran Fellowship committee for supporting my research trip; I hope your faith in me will soon be realized by seeing some of this material in print.

Please let me know if I can offer any more information; I can be reached at the address on the letterhead or at pjoshi@pugetsound.edu.

Sincerely,

Priti

Priti Joshi
Associate Professor & Chair
Department of English