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**Fashioning Diaspora Space: textiles, pattern and cultural exchange
between Britain and South Asia**

This project investigates the presence of 'South Asian' clothing textiles in 'British' culture in both colonial (1850s to 1880s) and post-colonial (1980s to 2000s) times. In exploring the processes of material cultural exchange between Britain and South Asia the research will cast new light on both the British imperial diaspora in the Indian subcontinent and contemporary South Asian diasporas in Britain.

At the height of British imperialism, 'Indian' textiles, patterns and techniques of printing and embroidery were both celebrated as part of the exhibition of colonised cultures and adopted as commercially successful inspirations for innovation in British fashion culture and textile manufacturing. In a contemporary echo, today British-Asian fashion designers and aesthetics are being proclaimed as representative of a postcolonial cosmopolitan multiculturalism, central to a wider popular celebration of a supposedly novel trend for 'Asian Kool' and its opportunities for 'ethnic entrepreneurship'. In both cases, the 'South Asian' forms being displayed and promoted emerge from complex entanglements of 'British' and 'South Asian' agencies, cultural and commercial interests, and attachments to tradition and modernity. This project will compare these colonial and postcolonial forms, untangling their genesis, their cultural designations and translations, and their implications for wider British material and visual cultural landscapes.

In centring transcultural objects, this research recognises that diaspora cultures exceed the identities of specific diasporic communities. Rather, concepts and

histories of diaspora alert us to deeper and wider re-imaginings of the relations between culture, place and identity. Instead of being mapped onto identifiable peoples and places, culture is conceived as the product of circuits of exchange and translation, of interrelated but distinct movements of people, objects and ideas. Whilst contemporary rhetorics of globalisation have brought such thinking to the fore, histories of colonialism and commerce attest to their longer relevance and demand comparative analysis of past and present processes of cultural exchange.

More specifically, this project will involve four interrelated strands of work devoted to such comparison. First, it will consider 'Indian' textiles associated with the colonial British diaspora. This historical analysis will centre on the collections of the South Kensington (now Victoria and Albert) Museum. Specifically, case study textiles will be selected from across three sets of acquisitions (1852-1883) embodying different ideologies of acquisition and dissemination. Research will focus on the biographies and geographies of case study textiles, tracing back to their 'origins' and the collecting practices that brought them to South Kensington and 'forward' to their uses in cultures of display, design, manufacture and consumption. Second, a parallel analysis will be undertaken of contemporary (1990s and 2000s) arrays of 'South Asian' textiles associated with the post-colonial South Asian diasporas resident in the UK. Here analysis will be focused on: the marketing of a representative sample of designs from the collections of British-Asian and Indian retailers selling in Britain over the last twenty years; contemporary spaces of retail display; and the consumption of South Asian textiles by variously ethnicised consumers. Third, using focus group and individual interview methods, engagements will be staged between clothing textiles from the V&A's collections and contemporary 'British-Asian' fashion and textile practitioners and consumers. Fourth, and reflecting a commitment to visual culture as a form of epistemology and practice led research, these collections of textiles will be creatively engaged with through processes of drawing. Focusing on pattern as a bearer of meaning and memory, this drawing practice will explore the relations between both colonial and postcolonial 'South Asian' textiles and the wider patterns and 'landscapes' they are placed in relation to (from the grammatical orderings of sample volumes, to the structural languages of museum archives and commercial catalogues, to the urban architectures of galleries and shops and streets). In so doing this work will engage critically with dominant framings of South Asian pattern as 'ornament' and 'vibrancy', representing the alternative diasporic relations between place and identity in which they are implicated.

The project involves research collaboration across disciplinary boundaries (cultural and historical geography, cultural history, fashion studies, textile history and curating, visual arts practice) and between University-based academics and researchers based in the cultural sector at the Victoria and Albert Museum. The project team comprises: Philip Crang (Principal Investigator; Professor of Cultural Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London), Rajiv Anand (South Asian Community Education Officer, Victoria and Albert Museum), Sonia Ashmore (Research Fellow, Victoria and Albert Museum), Christopher Breward (Deputy

Director of Research, Victoria and Albert Museum), Rosemary Crill (Senior Curator, South Asia, Victoria and Albert Museum), Shivani Derrington (Doctoral Research Student, Department of Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London), Felix Driver (Professor of Human Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London), Lesley Miller (Head of Textiles, Victoria and Albert Museum) and Helen Scalway (Research Associate, Royal Holloway, University of London).

Research findings will be presented through both scholarly papers and published materials addressed to a wider public, as well as via an on-line exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum and an exhibition of the project's visual artwork. The research will develop substantive knowledge on the presence of 'South Asian' fashion in Britain in both the past and present, thereby offering new insights on the diasporic nature of British culture in both colonial and post-colonial times. This understanding will be applied to critical reflection on the presence of South Asian textile materials in the Victoria and Albert Museum, to be utilised in both the on-line exhibition and planned reconfigurings of the Museum's 'Fashion and Textile' and 'South Asian' galleries.