Routes to Wonder: On Preparing a Research proposal

On the Ethics of Research:
The ethics of uncertainties,
of imagining alternatives,
of ambivalence, unfinishedness and conversations, and of epistemic humility which includes citing sources
Of routing wonder and chaos and elements of unpredictability through the form and structure of a research proposal

Title of Thesis/Dissertation

Thesis/Dissertation submitted to the
Department of English in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the award of the degree
of

M.A. (English)/ M. Phil. (English)/Doctor of Philosophy

Name

Logo, Name and Address of Institution

Name and Designation of Supervisor if no other page for featuring the
same

Year of Submission

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On Preparing a Research Proposal: Beginnings

Scope and Objectives/ Aims and Background

- Locate the context of your selected area of research in the beginning: The importance of historicising and locating your research in terms of tense and place, especially when it comes to proposals in the humanities and the social sciences: Which period and why? Which place and why?

- Introducing the definitive debates that define your field of research and how your chosen area resonates with that field in the scope and objectives section of the research proposal (In the context of Australian Studies for instance, some of the crucial questions could be, is it black or white or rainbow? Coloniser or colonised or the second-handed colonial cousin? A lingering trail of empire or belonging to the post-imperial? What about the angst or in-betweenness between its elect history and reluctant geography? Could Australia be defined in terms of its eluded pasts or as the futuristic promised land? The nationing project in Australia and the role of Asian interperfuming, and so forth). Another example from cultural studies: food and projections of cooking and cuisine (prepared dishes) and cooking spaces. See the chapter on "ornamental cookery" in Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* (1978), and the Malayalam film *The Great Indian Kitchen* (2021) or cooking shows - all of which render class aspirations and illusions of leisure, cooking as coating, also elusions from the reality of the problem, the exoticisation tending to dematerialisation of labour in the kitchen.

- Locating the tensions and undercurrents, the paradoxes and unspeakable/invisibilised in those debates

OBJECTIVES/AIMS OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSED

▸ What do you aim to do? What kind of a study? How do you want to communicate the results of that research - through conference/exhibition/monograph/publications?

▸ What are your research questions? - The why/how/when/who/what if questions formative for research (Why the whiteness debates in Australia in the formative decades of the Federation? How are difficult solidarities performed and projected in Ruskin Bond? Why? What if? - the door to possibilities. What if Netflix or the social media phenomenon build as much on the politics of forgetting as on technologies of echo chambers and speed? What is being forgotten, and why, and the comparisons in reading trends and patterns)

▸ How is your research located in the debates defining the related domain/s? How does it speak to those debates and what is the contemporary relevance/resonance of your research?

▸ Defining the boundaries of your research query - Indicate the context/place and time of your research query, and cite the reasons for your choice of that/those spaces and times, or authors and directors?

▸ Invoking the interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary and comparative dimensions of your research: My PhD thesis for instance invoked histories, protean national identities/alterities conceived around the nationing project, literary and parliamentary texts and philosophies in circulation in the two territories. According to Arindam Chakrabarti and Ralph Weber in the introductory chapter to their volume *Comparative Philosophy Without Borders* (2016), post-comparative philosophy – my term for what they dub "the spin . . . beyond comparative philosophy" – amounts to "just doing philosophy as one thinks fit for getting to the truth about an issue or set of issues, by appropriating elements from all philosophical views and traditions one knows of but making no claim of "correct exposition"". They envision such a "truly borderless" praxis to "spontaneously straddle geographical areas and cultures, temperaments and time-periods (mixing classical, medieval, modern, and postmodern), styles and subdisciplines of philosophy, as well as mix methods" in a globalized world. Such a praxis might help reduce the wild asymmetries, to begin with the post/colonial epistemological asymmetries, of the globalized world we presently inhabit. I have for instance used "tarkasamsara' as a metaphor in refrain throughout my thesis, in the context of exploring the India-resonant, translational/transnational imaginings of Australianness between 1890 and 1950. "Tarkasamsara", a Sanskrit term found in *Vivriti Vimarshini* (CE 1020) by Kashmiri philosopher Abhinavagupta (c. 960-1020 CE), compounds "tarka" and "samsara", the latter etymologically denoting "that which shifts or departs". "Samsara" connotes the fragile, worldwide web of exile and belonging as experienced by entangled individuals."Tarka" provokes conversations and churning between divergent positions and schools of thought, "samsara" rests on transits, unsettlement and unfinishedness. Australianness when perceived as tarkasamsara, becomes a weave always in the un/making, and threaded in dialogue, perceptual empathy and engagement with various others, rather than by race or kinship.

▸ If you are focussing on a specific author/authors or auteurs or creators in other fields, then introduce them, highlighting on the aspect of their work and thought that connects to your research, rather than a rote biography.

ON HOW TO FRAME A RESEARCH TITLE

- A research title could be created in two halves

- The first one: a pithy teaser to arrest attention, could contain a resonant quote from one of your primary texts or a co-text, or your own epigram/epithet reflective of your questions and cues

- The second part: longer and more "mundane", that specifies the scope/context of your research, in terms of time, place, authors and core texts, defines its boundaries

- Instances from titles of research proposals and dissertations by my mentors, students and self: "The Shape of the Nation: A Cultural History of the Map Iconography of Australia" (David Walker), ""Reality is something that is co-authored": Exploring the Politics of Forging and Fabricating Memories in Select Works of Veronica Ruth, Avni Doshi and Christopher Nolan" (Sankar Prasad Ghosh), "Angst of Forging Australianness: a Study of Early Australian Responses to India between 1890 and 1950 with Special Reference to Alfred Deakin (1856-1919) and Mollie Skinner (1876-1924)" (Ipsita Sengupta), "Of Becoming in Falling: Exploring the Healing and Resistance of the Deterritorialized in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things (1997) and The Ministry of Utmost Happiness (2017)" (Anindita Karmakar), "A Study of Indian Masculinity: Exploring the Performance of Colonial Masculinity in Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's Devdas and its Neo-Colonial Avatar in Anurag Kashyap's Dev D" (Sourav Bera)
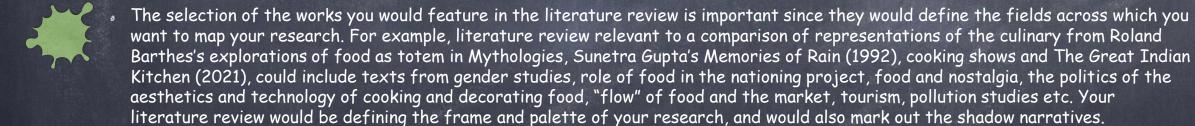
Literature Review

- You could select any five to ten works of <u>critical literature</u> which you consider to be significant for your research interest. These could include journal articles, book chapters, monographs, dissertations, podcasts or videos of lectures uploaded by an academic body/institution and related to your research domain, as available in digital archives, libraries, repositories or academic websites. The works should be representative of the major, and diverse, strands of the debates, classical and contemporary, formative of the domain.

- The selection of the works you would feature in the literature review is important since they would define the fields across which you want to map your research. For example, literature review relevant to a comparison of representations of the culinary from Roland Barthes's explorations of food as totem in Mythologies, Sunetra Gupta's Memories of Rain (1992), cooking shows and The Great Indian Kitchen (2021), could include texts from gender studies, role of food in the nationing project, food and nostalgia, the politics of the aesthetics and technology of cooking and decorating food, "flow" of food and the market, tourism, pollution studies etc. Your literature review would be defining the frame and palette of your research, and would also mark out the shadow narratives.

- Summarise and analyse each of these works, foregrounding the issues/aspects they highlight, their ideological perch and the dimensions they elude, and also the limitations of their frame.

The innovation and scholarly significance of the project/
How is this research going to be different?

This section is in conversation with the previous section comprising the literature review. Having identified the crucial research queries and gaps one would like to explore in the context of the literature review, one could now relate some of those research gaps to the research being presently undertaken.

Every research work/project is an act of continuity, epistemic humility and also, beginnings, no research could be an absolute in terms of originality. This section treads the razor's edge between the limn of the promised continuity and originality of the work.

The difference and significance could be on the following counts: 1. Has no concerted research been done in that particular domain before, though of course there would exist relevant work in neighbouring areas? Does it constitute a not-much-researched subset of a significant rubric in a research domain? 2. Is there new data discovered or new patterns to be read in the data that would open doors to new understandings of correlations? 3. Are elusive connections being foregrounded, on the basis of evidence and fresh beginnings to reading patterns, constellations, archival sources, extant data? 4. Does the research seek to re-read a socio-economic/gender/political margin, in the context of new understandings of its contemporary relevance? 5. Does it add a trans-dimension, a new intervention/interpretation by introducing a comparative angle (Paul Pickering's "Australia and -")? 6. Is a novel research method being used? For instance, to read Australia's India as also unlearn the gaze pre-scribed for such a subject, I use a post-comparative method, trans-infusing Indic terms, categories and theories e.g. 'anukrosha', 'tarkasamsara', 'samarasa' etc. into my theoretical framework while freely appropriating elements from the Western, metropolitan philosophical standpoints and traditions. I considered this boundary-breaking heteroglossic praxis through my thesis to be an epistemological intervention. Disrupting the epistemological colonisation that partitions between metropolitan sites of production of theory and the texts-as-fields/markets readied for their application/consumption, the research aims to create a trans-resonant conceptual matrix that could situate and explore Indo-Australian connections between 1890 and 1950 outside of the pre-scripts of a colonial past.

What is the significance of the project being undertaken in the contemporary context? Does it open up a new interdisciplinary approach, aligning areas of research that are often not explored in continuum, yet could crop rich harvest when studied together, say the connections between maps, affective geographies, literary iconography and historiographies and the debates around imagining the nation, and culture studies?

Sources

Sources - Primary and Secondary

▷ Primary sources: the core texts that you want to engage with, how they are connected to your research area and to each other, though one could not have an absolute list to begin with and there could be changes as you engage more with your research. They could also include manuscripts such as unpublished journal entries, speeches, letters etc., typescripts (of memoirs, sketches etc.), newspapers and newspaper clippings

▷ Secondary sources: Critical literature that you would consider relevant to the texts, and equally importantly, questions raised in your research. While some of these would be directly relevant to the texts and authors you explore, others could be related to the domains you wish to transfuse into your research, say race and race patriotism in case of the European empires, the vision of universal modernity and the 'coming man' in case of colonisation, also the links between Romanticism and colonisation (Nigel Leask's introduction to *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (1991)), colonisation and femininity, travel and translation etc. whereas a paper on post-truth today could compare templates of 'truth' in other tenses, say during the European Enlightenment and the 'aesthetic truth' sometimes performed in counter-narratives and rendered in the ethics of alternatives, as proposed in the first chapter of Bharata's *Natyashastra,* instead of being deluged by the excess and insulars of a strictly contemporary focus

▷ Secondary sources could also include fiction and non-fiction, ranging from memoirs, biographies, historical volumes and theoretical treatises to novels, poems, maps, newspaper articles, periodicals, epics and commentaries, if they comprise literature relevant to your research, as sources, inter-texts, and counter-texts.

METHODS

- Methods within the broader ambit of humanities and social sciences, could be very diverse across disciplines, and I could not be the expert to comment on all of those. However, a delineation of methods should be lucid, not vague such as qualitative/quantitative, and in these days of research tending to trans-disciplinarity, an integrated methodological approach comprising multiple methods in connected application, or methodological pluralism with an analytical and multi-dimensional approach, would be desirable.

- For the humanities and social sciences, comparative, interdisciplinary and translational methods, especially the translational method, proves indispensable nowadays, from an Indian and South Asian context.

- One could use the "post-comparative" method proposed by Ralph Weber and Arindam Chakrabarti in their volume *Comparative philosophy Without Borders* (2015), of mixing and matching different traditions and philosophies in a consciously methodological or instrumental fashion to explore and argue the case in hand. Theoretical terms and frames from the Western metropolitan centres could be made to cohabit and converse with epistemological, aesthetic and ethical categories from "elsewhere", including an Indic matrix. This could forge an innovative critical apparatus based on the hermeneutics of plurality and conversations.

- Literary methods - close textual exegesis and literary-critical reading of the primary texts while mapping them against their socio-political, historical and cultural contexts, relevant discourse analysis

- Historical methods - Archival research into unpublished sources including periodicals, testaments and testimonials, some of which are now available digitally, and exploring books, journals, magazines and newspaper-clippings of the period from multiple library holdings, among other sources, could prove fecund, transformative for most research works

- Cross-media resources and digital methods - The web resources hosted by academic institutions and associations, including podcasts and lecture series on camera

Conceptual Categories and/or Theoretical Framework

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- *Explore lucidly the core concepts being applied and/or re-examined in your research. These concepts could be invoked in terms of their historicity, the conventions of their usage by thinkers and whether you want to give them some new turn or field of application. For instance, the inverted bildungsroman (Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic (1979)), or U. R.Ananthamurthy's radical revision of the concept of "samskara" in his 1965 eponymous novel (or the less sombre "namakhalal cosmopolitanism" by Dr. Pranav Jain in Decentering Rushdie (2010))*

- *If it is some singular theoretical framework you want to use, then elucidate why you prefer that frame over others, its applicability in the context of your research, and your footnote /interventions to the frame in that context, including if you have translated terms and concepts from other disciplines, introduced a new category in an extant taxonomy or a new term for an elusive pattern/phenomenon which you propose to install in discourse with support of evidence and argument*

- *A research project may not always choose to remain harnessed to a strict singular theory, the theoretical framework in that case may morph into a suitably pluralist and multi-nodal text/ure woven throughout the thesis, unafraid of cross-temporal appropriation across geographies, and meshed into occasional tweaking, interpolation and neologisms by the researcher. The framework could then become a collage-craft in liminal categories resonant with trans-habits*

- *Important to focus on the epistemic/political premise or promise embedded in the choice of your theoretical framework (Of transfusion, hunger for alterities, for instance)*

TENTATIVE CHAPTERISATION FROM QUESTION TO QUESTION

- A Preview/Review, not a Final Solution

- Helps one Organise the Structure and Themes

- Important to focus on patterns and comparisons of nomad themes that braid your chosen, *and placed* texts, in the chapters, rather than devoting a

  chapter to a text

- The Introduction and Conclusion should weave the themes together, the conclusion especially seeding further questions consequent to the present

  research proposal, in conversation with the introduction

- Important to present the research as a conversation to be continued, an unfinished affair

Preparing the List of Works Cited

- The list of works cited should be relevant to your primary and secondary sources, and the inter/disciplinary domains in which *you* would want to place your research, instead of being obscure, arcane, or featuring titles you have no idea about, but have inserted to show you know the trends in vogue

- Follow consistently the latest version of a stylesheet for academic writing, MLA and Chicago being two the most widely used, and be accurate as to the details.

- Here is a brief sample of the list of works I have looked at to learn from, while preparing this presentation on writing a research proposal. I have followed the 9th edition of the MLA Stylesheet (2021):

Arthur, Paul Longley, and Katherine Bode, editors. *Advancing Digital Humanities: Research, Methods, Theory.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Barry, Peter. *English in Practice: In Pursuit of English Studies*. Arnold, Holder Headline, 2003.

Brause, Rita S. *Writing Your Doctoral Dissertation*. Routledge, 2000.

Dawson, Catherine. *A-Z of Digital Research Methods*. Routledge, 2020.

Griffin, Gabriel. *Research Methods for English Studies*. 2005. 2nd ed., Edinburgh University Press, 2013.

Hartley, James. *Academic Writing and Publishing: A practical handbook*. Routledge Falmer, 2008.

Kumar, Ranjit. *Research Methodology; A Step by Step Guide for Beginners*. 2nd ed. Pearson, 2007.

O' Leary, Zina. *The Essential Guide to Doing Your Research Project*. 3rd ed., Sage, 2017.

Rahim, F. Abdul. *Thesis Writing: A Manual for Researchers*. 2007. 2nd ed., New Age International Publishing, 2015.

Wayne, C. Booth, Gregory G. Colombo, Joseph M. Williams, and William C. Booth. *The Craft of Research: From Planning to Reporting*. Chicago University Press, 2008.

PITCHING THE PROJECT RIGHT FOR GRANT CAPTURE OR APPLICATION FOR FELLOWSHIP

➤ **Placing the proposed research in the context of the stated missions of the institute you are applying to is important, you could insert one or two of the terms that they use to define their research vision in your project statement**

➤ **Underline the connections of your proposed research with the research networks and projects already being undertaken at the institute to which you are applying for the grant**

➤ **Proposed research outputs: monograph/other publications, conference, exhibition, creation of online database of data being mined**

➤ **Other related academic activities to be undertaken at the institution during the fellowship**