

Grant Number: 2006-0-007

Grantee : Shumona Goel, Mumbai

Grant Amount : Rs 5,26,455

Grant Period : One year from November 1, 2006

### **Précis**

This grant supports the development of *Family Tree*, a film installation for public space. *Family Tree* will explore the psychological consequences of migration, especially loneliness, melancholy and the emotional turbulence caused by life and work in alien surroundings and thereby highlight the disruptive and incoherent migrant experience. The installation will attempt to deform the concept of the family tree in order to consider 21st century family lives, which are dynamic and constantly in motion. Grant funds will pay for production costs, film stock, tapes and software, exhibition costs, equipment hire, professional fees, communication, conveyance, stationery and research costs.

## Grant Description

Shumona Goel has been making short personal films on 35mm and 16mm film formats for several years now. Her main concern has been the exploration of issues of displacement and migration. This grant supports Shumona's project *Family Tree*—a film installation, for public space—which will enable her to extend her current practice and deconstruct the film form as she moves from single screen to multiple screens.

As Shumona says: "Formally, film is separated into its elements: photography, motion film, and sound. Seamless forms like documentary cannot capture the fragmented experience of migration. By contrast, 'Family Tree' displays the film form in parts in order to emphasize the disruptive and incoherent migrant experience." A family tree is a map people use to locate themselves in history. They draw branches to forge links to ancestors or roots and subsequently assume that family members share similar traits. Shumona points out, however, that this is a restrictive model, at odds with the experience of migrant families whose directions cannot be anticipated or directed. Through this installation, Shumona will attempt to deform the concept of the family tree in order to consider 21st century family lives, which are dynamic and constantly in motion.

Shumona was born and brought up in central Pennsylvania, a predominantly Anglo-Saxon, suburban area within a small community of Indian immigrants. Growing up, she and her siblings were profoundly shaped by the alienating effects of migration: her father's frustrated struggle to suppress his academic interests for success in the corporate industry; her mother's futile efforts to allay her sadness through perpetual movement; and her own feelings of displacement as children being shuttled between India and America, not quite feeling at home in either place. As her parents encouraged her to choose an education unusual for children of their generation of Indian immigrants, Shumona went on to study filmmaking at Bard College, USA.

'The Stranger', Shumona's first film, was about a middle-aged man who, after thirty years of living abroad, returns home, only to be rejected by his family. This film was shot with her family members improvising as actors but addressing real events. This process, although emotionally and practically excruciating, enabled Shumona to recognise her aesthetic commitment to documenting chosen parts of her personal life. She later came to India to study briefly at Jawaharlal Nehru University, and then moved to Mumbai, where she made her second film 'Atreyee' - a personal documentation of the struggle of a young woman who moves from a small town to a big city.

For *Family Tree*, Shumona intends on using source materials that are not literal, but expressive. The lack of a narrative arc favours a more poetic arc. The tree is a metaphor to see what a person or a family may feel like in motion or in pieces. By attempting to express the internal experiences of a migrant, this installation will fracture a single, solitary sense of self to demonstrate how migrants adopt or invent multiple and conflicting roles to cope with changing environments.

Shumona visualises the installation Shumona as a juxtaposition of film loops of branches in chaotic motion with archival film footage of a quiet forest of trees, and footage of her mother returning home from a mental institution with home videos shot in the 1980s of birthday parties, wedding receptions, and Indian cultural performances in small town American parades. The viewer will also encounter a television on which low-tech videos chronicle the personal histories of Indian families in the USA. In one video, Indian immigrant women perform a fashion show for an American country club. By

mixing feelings of melancholy with perverse humour, Shumona hopes that these raw and often outrageous videos will resonate with unexpected poetry.

In deconstructing the moving image form, Shumona will combine her own family photographs with postcards exchanged between her parents and their family in rural India. She describes a photograph of a family priest with long dreadlocks and saffron robes reclining on a quaint, suburban poolside chair. In another photograph, a young Indian girl plays with her doll in a rural trailer park. Meanwhile, an ambient soundtrack will force the viewer to experience anxious phone conversations between migrants and distant family members. These personal exchanges fade into audible news reports—summaries of social interaction. Shumona will link the experiences of her family's immigration to the USA in the 1960s, to her own more recent reverse migration to India.

Although Shumona has been making experimental films that explore cinematic styles and forms, this piece, she says, represents a unique approach to film and film art. It transcends the confines of drama and story, and positions itself against the narrative expectations of a film. It attempts to break with the classical narrative notion in order to privilege multi-layered examinations of migrant identity.

Ultimately, Shumona sees the exhibiting *Family Tree* as resisting “art galleries in order to favour an exhibition space which is defiantly haphazard, because the piece is, at least in part, about the struggle of migrants to carve out a space for themselves”. She thus hopes to provoke dialogue among artists, writers, curators and innovative filmmakers in order to evolve new modes of curatorship and increase support for transnational artists.

## **Budget**

Production costs	Rs 1,88,105
Film stock, tapes and software	1,12,000
Professional fees	70,500
Exhibition costs	65,500
Equipment hire	60,000
Communications, conveyance and stationery	20,350
Research costs	<u>10,000</u>
Total	<u>Rs 5,26,455</u>