South Asia Archive

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The ANU Library has been in a fortunate position to provide our users full access to the South Asia Archive. The Archive began as an idea tossed about in conversations in Oxford amongst Indian PhD students and postdoctoral fellows[1]. From a mere idea, Boria Majumdar and Sharmistha Gooptu gave it life. They set up the South Asia Research Foundation with the focus on developing an online library that can provide access to pages and pages of historic texts. Traversing the South Asian sub-continent, they hunted down maps, photographs, film-posters and other such ephemera at odd and unusual places (book fairs, private bathrooms), spent hours in cramped, dusty and damp places and with much care, faithfully reproduced them digitally. Their hard work produced an electronic collection of several million pages of texts.

In partnership with Routledge, the Foundation set out to build the digital South Asia Archive. It currently holds 5 million pages of primary and secondary material from novels, film posters, religious tracts, census reports, government acts and journal publications ranging roughly from the early 18th century to the early 1950s. Although a majority of the material is in English, there is much in Bengali, and some in Sanskrit, Hindi, Marathi and other South Asian languages. Most of the material pertains to India, but does not preclude that on Sri Lanka, Burma, Nepal, Tibet and other neighbouring countries. Using a unique indexing system, the Archive is thoroughly searchable, with the aim of promoting both targeted and serendipitous research, and quick content discoverability.

Conceived as a "specialist digital platform"[2], the Archive has received many positive reviews. Amongst which notes "it is sufficiently broad, eclectic and imaginatively conceived to be of immense value to virtually all the disciplinary fields"[3] and pronounced its pre-eminence in South Asian studies as potentially "transform[ing] the academic study of South Asia…open[ing] a new window on India's recent past and mak[ing] a major difference to the status of South Asia studies outside India"[4]. David Arnold of University of Warwick, UK, writes of the Archive,

> *For any historians of science, technology and medicine this is an undoubted treasure trove, but much the same could be said of the possibilities it offers for in-depth research on education and the law or on agriculture and urban environments.*

From ANU's trial of the Archive in 2014, many potential users note the following:

> *…it has an extraordinary range of materials in it which are extremely useful to a scholar such as myself who is interested in how Indian traditions interacted with modernity in the 19th and 20th centuries.*

> *…[the] Archive is invaluable…makes the task of searching an archive enormously easier…the ability to conduct historical research without having to fly to India or London is an enormous benefit…*

> *This archive is an invaluable, rich and rare resource for students and academic alike…*

> *Great compendium of important and esoteric material…an essential tool for all doing historical work on South Asia.*

Hence, it is with much pleasure the ANU Library invites friends and fellow researchers to explore the South Asia Archive when you visit us in Canberra.

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[1] Gooptu, Sharmistha and Boria Majumdat. 2013. The South Asia Archive. *South Asian History and Culture* 4 (1):126-143. DOI: 10.1080/19472498.2012.750461

[2] The Twenty-First Century Solution to Increasing Demands for a Dedicated South Asia E-resource: a positioning paper from Routledge, Taylor & Francis, p.3.

[3] Arnold, David. 2013. The South Asia Archive, Taylor & Francis, 2013, www.southasiarchive.com, *Contemporary South Asia*, 21 (3): 333-336. DOI: 10.1080/09584935.2013.826631

[4] Reisz, Matthew. 2013. "South Asia online archive launched." *Times Higher Education.* http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/south-asia-online-archive-launched/2004692.article