



South Asia
Archive

CHOICE: Reviews Online Review of South Asia Archive October 2013

A curated selection of archival materials from the Calcutta-based nonprofit South Asia Research Foundation, the South Asia Archive gathers materials from a time span of some 250 years, from about 1700 to 1953. The editors in chief, Boria Majumdar (Univ. of Central Lancashire, UK) and Sharmistha Gooptu (South Asia Research Foundation), bring significant expertise as historians of South Asia to their selection and organization of materials. The site's home page offers the option of browsing by subject (from Agriculture/Environment to Urban Studies). It also offers four main tabs: Home Page, Explore Content, Advanced Search, and About. Explore Content provides an alphabetical list of the database's content, which may be limited by document type, subject area, and language (the vast majority of documents are in English, with some in Bengali and a few in Sanskrit). Users may sort results by publication or document type, and in ascending/descending order. Advanced Search allows those who want to go beyond Quick Search to search by full text, title, keyword, author, and publisher, and then apply various limits, including the adjustable Publication Date time line.

Books, journal articles, legal documents, and reports are well represented in the database. Also included are Indian film booklets from the 1930s to 1950s, census reports, calendars, maps, and more. Such rich coverage in terms of content type and format contrasts with a narrow geographic scope: the vast majority of sources derive from Indian Bengal. Document record pages cover the most basic descriptive information--often just title, language, year of publication, document type, and subject--usually accompanied by thumbnail images. Image display screens allow for full-color views, easy zooming, toggling to the full page, and PDF downloading; a smoother page-flip feature could enhance this application. Help features--linked at the bottom of the home page--include a guide for librarians and a useful series of videos on browsing, searching, and viewing content. This digital archive will prove an invaluable resource to those studying South Asian (specifically Bengali) history, particularly because of its helpful and relatively consistent organizational scheme.

Summing Up: Highly recommended. Lower-level undergraduates and above.

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