Dear All,

In our second issue, we bring to you news from various private archives in Southasia: Tasveer Ghar, Delhi; Nepal Picture Library; Kathmandu, Archive of Indian Music; Bangalore; and Madan Puraskar Pustakalya; Kathmandu..

We are also elated to announce that work on the first Southasian exhibition of private collections has progressed steadily. The first Hri travelling exhibition will be held in July 2013 at the Punjab Kala Bhawan, Chandigarh in collaboration with Panjab Digital Library; subsequently, exhibitions will be held in Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh. We present here a sneak preview of some of the treasures to be exhibited under the theme: Lived Stories, Everyday Lives.

As our projects reach the final stages, we are sad to announce that some of our talented researchers will be leaving us in the coming months, but we hope to bounce back with new projects.

The Hri Team
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Since 2006, Tasveer Ghar has been a trans-national virtual “home” for collecting, digitizing, and documenting various materials, largely printed, produced by Southasia’s vibrant popular visual sphere. Posters, calendar art, pilgrimage maps and paraphernalia, cinema hoardings, advertisements, and other forms of street and bazaar art are part of this exciting collection. Under the coordination of founding members Christiane Brosius (Heidelberg University), Sumathi Ramaswamy (Duke University), and Yousuf Saeed (Ektara, New Delhi), the collective invites practitioners and academic scholars to share their views on and knowledge of vernacular visual (and audio-visual) culture in India. Since pictures have the capacity to move more easily across national boundaries, Tasveer Ghar also intends to invite visual essays on other Southasian countries. Please visit our website for our visual essays: www.tasveerghar.net

Some key fields of exploration within the network are the social and performative life of images include the histories and everyday lives and voices of producers, disseminators and ‘consumers’ and various techniques of visuality/media of visualisation (for instance, ritual or theatrical per-formance, or political spectacle).

We hope that our network, which we envisage as an open access, democratic space, will also serve as a hub around which to promote dialogue and debate on matters pertaining to Southasian popular visual culture, for research and teaching, for stimulating conversations around the role of visual cultures and media in everyday worlds. Our aspiration is to help promote inter-disciplinary scholarly exchange across the globe between academics, artists, with a particular but not exclusive focus on South Asia.

Currently, we are editing a volume with 20 essays from TasveerGhar entitled “Visual Homes, Image Worlds: Essays from TasveerGhar, the House of Pictures”, to be published by Yoda Press, New Delhi (2013).

Brosius and Saeed are also editing a series of 11 essays on the theme of Sufi popular visual and media cultures, based on stipends availed by the Cluster ‘Asia and Europe in a Global Context’ as well as a workshop on the topic, both at Heidelberg University. These online essays, published on Visual Pilgrim, a platform hosted by the Heidelberg Research Area assemble essays on Sufi devotionalism, pilgrimage and image ‘routes’ in global/local media landscapes, with essays ranging from the Middle East to Pakistan to Bangladesh to Singapore.

Tasveer Ghar has also curated and digitised the Priya Paul Collection, which is now hosted at Heidelberg University and assembles over 3800 annotated images. Via the web-interface of the Transcultural Image Database Tamboti the images will be further annotated by local and international experts. The Priya Paul Collection of Popular Art contains illustrations from the late 19th and early 20th century. The collection includes commercial labels that were glued onto parcels of textiles imported from Britain or made in India, cinema memorabilia, and posters of gods. Sometimes they reflect an interesting blend of East and West: Asian subjects illustrated in western styles and vice versa for Indian or European markets.

In its attempt to network across various database initiatives, Tasveer Ghar is linked to Visual Pilgrim, an initiative based on the circulation of images across historical, spatial and multi-media dimensions. The aim of this project is to develop an interactive, multimedia and multi-layered presentation that locates transcultural connections and flows between various Sufi shrines or Islamic pilgrimage centres in India and its transnational peripheries by plotting hundreds of documented images, videos, audios and objects onto the maps, thereby making linkages between different regions. URL: http://visualpilgrim.uni-hd.de/

Book cover, The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India
Priya Paul Collection
Four members of the Nepal Picture Library (NPL) team based in Kathmandu traveled to New Delhi in late April to visit several archives including the Alkazi Foundation and Nehru Memorial Museum Library (NMML).

These institutions are reputed for some of the best practices in professional archive management in India. Also, these archives are known to have collections related to Nepal that do not exist even within Nepal. The intention of the visit was to view these photo collections, meet with the archivists and other management staff in person and learn about their collection management and other professional practices. Nepal Picture Library is currently exploring several possibilities of collaboration with these archives in Delhi.

SWOTHA Gallery Opening
Nepal Picture Library set up SWOTHA GALLERY that opened doors to visitors on 12 March 2013 in Swotha Tol, 50 m from the history Patan Durbar Square. The gallery is located on the ground floor of a beautifully restored traditional Newar house. It offers visitors guided gallery tours and signed, limited edition archival prints for purchase.

The gallery has been established to serve as a permanent exhibition space for NPL’s growing archival collections. In addition to being an exhibition space, SWOTHA GALLERY also hopes to become a hub for collecting old photographs and stories from Patan. The gallery will invite the neighborhood to come in with their old photographs and get them digitized professionally. A sound booth to record stories and interviews will also be set up.

Currently on view is a collection by Patan-based photographer Mukunda Bahadur Shrestha. “I am very happy to show my work here in my hometown Patan.” said Shrestha. “My photographs had been forgotten about for many years. Archiving them has given my work a new life.” He added. Shrestha spent the 70’s and 80’s travelling across Nepal, photographing mountains, culture and people. His photographs introduced Nepal to the world. NPL has digitized more than 11,000 of his slides and negatives.
Soon after the publication of my book My name is Gauhar Jaan! on the life and times of the first musician of the Subcontinent to record commercially on the gramophone in 1902, I went to Berlin on a six-month fellowship at the Wissenschaftskolleg (Institute for Advanced Study) to research the early gramophone recordings of India. In the early 20th Century, when recording technology came calling, the actual recording was done in makeshift studios across the country. The records however were manufactured at Hanover and hence Germany seemed the most appropriate place for research on the subject. On a visit to one such archive in Berlin, I listened to recordings of prisoners of the First World War who had been jailed there. There were about 200 recordings of Indian prisoners, who were asked to narrate a joke or an anecdote with the promise of a beedi or so in return. The result is moving recordings of the voices of our ancestors in a variety of languages from Sindhi and Bengali to Tamil and Pushto.

The Chief Archivist walked up to me and asked, “Doesn’t India have a National Sound Archive?” This would be a question I heard over and over again during my visits to archives across Europe, all of which had sizeable holdings of Indian recordings. As a student of music and history, and more so as an Indian, it was deeply embarrassing to admit that we did not have institutionalized and easily accessible repositories of audio recordings. Strange that in a country where music is so ubiquitous—from birth to death, festivals and seasons, marriages and revelries—documentation and preservation of that very music is considered unimportant.

While in Berlin I drafted a proposal on archiving music and upon my return, shared this with the highest powers—that be, who were very interested in the concept. But bureaucratic tardiness kept the files rotating between ministries and I lost my patience. Help came from unexpected quarters in the shape of T V Mohandas Pai, who was then with Infosys and now the Chairman of Manipal Global Education services. Upon hearing that valuable cultural heritage lies rotting in flea markets across the country, he adopted this project by providing seed capital. Things moved rapidly thereafter.

The Archive of Indian Music or AIM operates out of its office in Bangalore where we stationed all the digitization equipment. AIM sources gramophone records from across India from flea markets and through donations from generous record collectors and the archive has already collected close to 10,000 records from different parts of the country…and still counting! The range of recordings is mind-boggling: from Hindustani and Carnatic classical music, to theatre recordings, folk music, early cinema, voices of great leaders like Gandhiji, Pt. Nehru, Tagore, Subhash Bose and others.
Along with preservation, the most important task of an archive is necessarily dissemination. There is no point bringing the content from one closed system to another, which is seldom accessible to people at large. With this view and to bring back these vintage recordings into public consciousness, we took the decision to make all of these freely available. The Archive’s portal www.archiveofindianmusic.org has regular uploads of the latest digitized tracks, along with interesting information of that era, artist biographies, photographs and so on. AIM also envisions having thematic audio exhibitions, which are a rarity in India. We had the first such exhibition titled “Voices of India”, in Bangalore in May 2013 where using the latest technology of Android phone Apps, we provided a listening immersion into the oldest music and recordings of the country for the visitors. Through 2013 the exhibition hopes to travel to various cities of India. AIM also hopes to set up listening kiosks at different places and intends to take these recordings of yore to schools and colleges to open young minds to a new perspective of looking at Indian history—through the prism of sound.

Zohra Bai of Agra
When asked to write a few paragraphs about my impressions as a visiting researcher at the Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya, Kathmandu (MPP), I was happy to agree, grabbing the chance to share some thoughts about a talented group of people making important progress for libraries in Nepal.

I’ve been a systems librarian and archivist at a small, liberal arts university in the U.S. for about ten years. The road to MPP began with a plan for an Open Source library software Fulbright proposal. In 2011, MPP was only one of several libraries that I planned to visit to gather some information about Nepal’s library technology. I wanted to find out about the impact of Open Source software on Nepali academic and research libraries in particular – did they use it, and how? Did Open Source software live up to its purported promise, allowing Nepal’s libraries to automate, to create better user services, to share their collections worldwide? I decided to interview library staff there to understand MPP’s role in moving library technology forward. I was particularly eager to ask about the Language Technology Kendra project they were carrying out with Computer Science specialists at Kathmandu University.

Along with its low-cost, one of Open Source’s main advantages is a feature known as “localization,” which allows the software to be modified for the language requirements of users. For libraries in Nepal, many of which own collections that are written in non-Roman/Western alphabets, this capability is critical – for many years, available cataloging software (for example) forced Nepali librarians to use Roman/Western alphabets to catalog materials printed in Devanagari. Transliteration inevitably leads to a loss of information, introduces errors, and obscures texts from researchers; but more disturbingly, it prevents a country’s users from having full use of original sources written in their own language. Localization can thus prevent a language from becoming marginalized, but it’s up to local software developers to make the necessary programming changes. Languages with millions upon millions of speakers world-wide, such as French, Spanish, and Mandarin, will have no shortage of programmers able and willing to make those changes. For languages like Nepali, whose speakers are concentrated in a smaller area, the group of people capable of this work is far more limited - a fact which brings me back to MPP.

Before my first meeting with Shamik Mishra, Program Officer at MPP and his colleague Vijay Shrestha, I already knew that the expertise of MPP’s librarians and staff was unusual, and not only among Nepali libraries. After that meeting, my impression only deepened. As Southasia’s (and possibly the world’s) only library specializing in the Nepali language, MPP’s need for localization was exceptional. Equally exceptional was their ability to do what was required to create their own software tools to manage their collections. And they were willing to share with others; I began to think of that library as a talent-farm for Open Source software, with benefits that reached far beyond their own premises.

Later that year, I interviewed Dibyendra Hyoju and Pawan Thapa, programmer/catalogers working to customize Open Source library automation software called Koha among about MPP twenty-five staff, noting also that because of a recent move, their book-storage strategies were remarkably similar to those of my own library’s archives – fruit boxes stacked wherever room allowed, a practical solution for a universal problem. Back in the U.S., my Fulbright grant proposal to carry out a case study of MPP and a couple of other Nepali research libraries, to discover more about Open Source software’s potential was accepted and I was able to head back to MPP in October 2012. And that’s when I found that so much had changed.
Again Shamik and Pawan, along with Amar Gurung, Prabin Paudel, and Sajan Subedi greeted me at a hastily-scheduled meeting just before Tihar. Noting so many empty workspaces, I thought that everyone must have gone home for the holidays. As we sat at the central work-table, Amar filled in some details on recent projects, answered a few questions - and then, after pausing to take a long pull of water from a glass bottle labeled “GIN,” he imparted unwelcome news. MPP had suspended most of its functions due to a lack of money to continue. My spirits sank – who could continue the work of MPP? Some staff members are continuing collaborative projects with various libraries, among other activities, all on a volunteer basis. The future is uncertain, although staff seems optimistic and they are certainly more than dedicated to the library’s mission. Without a doubt, the success of Open Source software in Nepal’s libraries is due in large part to that same dedication, coupled with a rare flexibility that most libraries would find difficult to match. The challenge now is how to keep it alive.
**Murree during the Raj**  
*May 2013*

It takes us a few minutes to locate Professor Farakh Khan’s house. We’re on Sundar Das road, Lahore, a hub of old colonial buildings flanked by massive gardens. Professor Khan’s house, when we finally find it, doesn’t disappoint either: a more modern structure, it overlooks a large, manicured backyard. We’re here to talk about his book on Murree, and the museum he is helping set up at the hill station.  

**The Truth of the Jaffna Bible**  
*March 2013*

Minority rights of the Tamils of Sri Lanka have been fore-fronted around the discussions at the United Nations Humans Rights Council in Geneva, as well as the Indian Parliament. Yet, many Tamils in Sri Lanka demanding that the government respect the rights of minorities are the very people who as supporters of the LTTE suppressed Tamil rights. As Tamils rightly accuse the Sinhalese majority of Sri Lanka of rewriting history and school texts to cast Tamils as invaders and the Sinhalese as settlers, it is pertinent to ask if we Tamils too do not exhibit similar tendencies of selective historiography.  

**Perhaps some day I might end up as a poet after all**  
*March 2013*

Since being Faiz Ahmed Faiz’s daughter has given me privileged access to the family archives, I have become an accidental archivist. In 2009 I embarked upon the Faiz Ghar project to set up a small museum in a house leased to us by a friend and admirer of my father. We commenced sorting through Faiz’s belongings, papers and books. It was not a massive collection by any means, owing to his nomadic, rather Spartan, but interesting life, that began on 13 February 1911 and ended on 20 November 1984.  
Not Ranjha Enough
May 2013

Culture is perhaps the most abused word in Pakistani society. Recently the political establishment of the country raised an objection to the screening of Turkish soap operas dubbed in Urdu on private channels saying they were “against the cultural traditions of Pakistan”. Similar arguments are raised against indigenous festivals like Lohri, Vaisakhi and the latest casualty is Basant, the spring festival.
Read more: http://www.hrisouthasian.org/blog/18-love-legends/392-not-ranjha-enough.html

Dance now, Sohni, Cross now
April 2013

Giddha is a Punjabi folk dance form; a total dance that includes acting, dance, rhythm and singing, traditionally by and for women. It is performed in an inward circle, over Bollian. These Bollian - plural of Boll, where Boll, literary meaning language, is a form of folk song - are composed by the women themselves. In the words of senior journalist and writer Giani Gurdit Singh, "connoisseurs of folk songs argue that constant rubbing on people’s tongue have blessed songs with softness like hill stones. ... The softness of millions of lips and tongues polish folk tunes .
Read more: http://www.hrisouthasian.org/initiatives/love-legends/388--dance-now-sohni-cross-now.html/

Quilting Stories
April 2013

What is your most special memory of your grandmother? Here is mine: of Dadi, my paternal grandma. When I was due to leave for Hyderabad to pursue a post graduate degree, I was being greatly fussed over. I had never spent a long time away from home. There were some words of advice, some farewell gifts but Dadi didn’t indulge me; she quietly gave me a spool of thread and a needle. "You’ll find it useful," she said. She loved sewing, stitching, darning and making patchwork quilts, somewhat like Agusta, the grandmother in Merle Almeida’s ‘My Godri Anthology’, a new book that pieces together a collage of memories through the enduring, colourful, creative and homely metaphor of the ‘godri’ or the patchwork quilt beautifully.
Through a series of pictorial, textual and audio-visual vignettes, this exhibition seeks to better understand how the past around us has been lived and pursued. The everyday is arguably the most obvious, the most conspicuous, the most social, and yet the most inaccessible part of our lived lives. Cutting across the boundaries of region and nation-state, the representations from collections across Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka help us grasp a shared past that is being slowly effaced by time, politics, and by the constant impulse to keep changing. This exhibition thus, is as much about knowing the antecedents of our present as it is about getting familiar with our collective pasts.

From L to R: Panjab Digital Library, Liberation War Museum, Nepal Picture Library, Afghan Box Camera Project
The Hri Team

Chair
Kanak Mani Dixit

Director
Laxmi Murthy

Programme Manager
Sarita Ramamoorthy

Researchers
Daljit Ami (Chandigarh)
Geoff Myint (Yangon)
Haroon Khalid (Lahore)
Sujeet George (Mumbai)

Interns
Sadia Khatri (Karachi)
Utsav Dhakal (Kathmandu)

Advisers
Hari Sharma (Kathmandu)
Kumari Jayawardene (Colombo)
Mitu Varma (New Delhi)
Ramachandra Guha (Bangalore)
Sadanand Menon (Chennai)
Salima Hashmi (Lahore)
Sanjib Baruah (Guwahati/New Delhi)