# The World according to GNARP: Prospects for Transatlantic Library Partnership in the Digital Age

**6th Scientific Symposium Frankfurt a.M.**

## *India and South Asia in Germany*

First of all let me say what a pleasure and privilege it is to have been invited to speak at this conference today. It is a great honour to join you in the programme you have called "Prospects for Transatlantic Library Partnership in the Digital Age". In the spirit of this initiative I will take a decidedly practical approach to the question of resource sharing by presenting the following topics:

First, I will delineate the history of the Special Subject Collection South Asia funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and housed at the University Library of Tübingen until 2004 before it was continued by the Library of the South Asia Institute in Heidelberg in 2005. I will then present in greater detail some parts of our new project, the Virtual Library South Asia which we have been building during the last two years. After considering this project I will turn to the possible meaning and value of these activities for resource sharing with North American specialist libraries.

## 1. A short history of the special subject collection "South Asia"

Today's special subject collections rest upon the German Research Foundation's decision to re-instate in a modified way the plan for establishing special subject collections from the time between the two world wars. The guiding principle behind the idea was that at least one copy of each academically relevant publication – general as well as highly specialized – should be readily available within Germany. Taken together all special subject collections were intended to compensate for a non-existent German National Library.

Shortly after its establishment in 1949 the German Research Foundation requested the national university libraries – among others - to signal their willingness to take on

responsibility for one or more special subject collections. Thus, three special subject collections from the field of "Oriental Studies" were taken on by the university library of Tübingen in 1950, among them the SSG 6,24 "Indology".

The library already had a substantial collection of South Asian holdings dating back to the middle of the 19th century when Professor Rudolf von Roth, head of the university library and one of the leading indologists of the time, had begun to collect and catalogue indological literature on a large scale – activities which were also continued by his successors.

Today the Special Subject Collection "Indology" is called SSG "South Asia" due to a change of perspective among researchers and academics that has taken place during the last twenty-five years – namely from classical indology towards a regional focus that was largely driven by an increasing awareness of regional language sources as important historical evidence for a study of "history from below".

Accordingly, the scope of the collection includes the following countries: India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives as well as Tibet before the Chinese occupation in the 1950s. The subjects covered are languages and literatures, history, politics, geography, anthropology and sociology, art and art history as well as religion and philosophy. Especially the first and the last subjects, i.e. languages and literatures and religion and philosophy entail all the diversity and difficulties which makes this special subject collection different. South Asia's variety of languages is almost legendary, and it is not only a variety of languages but also a variety of writing systems. With the exception of a few tribal languages all of them are literary languages with a vast corpus of classical and modern literature.

Four religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism – have their origin in South Asia and produced a vast amount of religious literature, mainly in Sanskrit or Pali.

The South Asia Collection of the University Library of Tübingen can roughly be estimated to consist of around 360.000 volumes, several hundred periodicals and about 800 manuscripts, among them a valuable Atharvaveda Paippalada manuscript written on birch bark.

In 2005 responsibility for the Special Subject Collection South Asia was assigned to the library of the South Asia Institute in Heidelberg in cooperation with the

University Library. The South Asia Institute was established in 1962 as an interdisciplinary center for the study of South Asia and is affiliated to the University of Heidelberg. With its eight departments – Classical and Modern Indology, History of South Asia, Anthropology, Politics, Economics and Geography the Institute unites Cultural Studies and Social Sciences and Economics under one roof, which is, in the field of South Asian Studies, still unique in Germany.

The Institute's library, already established in 1960, holds more than 265.000 volumes and 500 current periodicals with an annual increase of approximately 5.000 volumes and even today owns one of Europe's largest special subject collections in this field. Part of its collection are manifold publications by governmental and non-governmental organisations as well as a large collection of South Asian school-books. As I have already mentioned, from January 2005 the University Library Heidelberg in cooperation with the South Asia Institute has been not only responsible for the Special Subject Collection South Asia but also for the implementation of the Virtual Library South Asia.

## 2. The concept of Virtual Libraries

The steady increase of digital resources and their utilization, changing information needs of the scholarly community, but also new technical developments in the field of information and communication have made it necessary for the system of decentralized special subject collections and library services to respond to those new requirements by introducing a range of new services. Against this background the German Research Foundation initiated the development of so-called "Virtual Libraries" in 1998.

Virtual Libraries are intended to function as centralized repositories by extending the efforts of collection development to the realm of digital information, i.e. Virtual Libraries are expected to offer access to print publications, to freely accessible internet resources as well as to digital resources offered by publishers in a homogenous search environment.

## 3. Savifa – the Virtual Library South Asia (www.savifa.de)

Savifa, the Virtual Library South Asia, offers access to information and literature from and about South Asia as a subject gateway within the broad range of the regional sciences. So far there has been no service allowing a centralized kind of South Asia research for print and digital publications.



By offering the following elements Savifa aims at filling this gap:

- **SavifaGuide:** SavifaGuide offers access to carefully selected internet resources such as thematic and institutional websites. The subject collection is a hand-picked assemblage of websites and resources, that meet certain quality standards and are selected by subject specialists and organized into browsable hierarchies by subject, region and language, allowing users to explore the collection by clicking from the more general down to the more specific. Apart from various browsing options the user can also choose between simple search and advanced search for more specific search queries.

Rather than containing thousands of entries, our collection is the focussed, quality collection that we as specialists have deemed valuable to our domain of subject content. Thus, they are selective, classified by subject, cross-referenced and annotated by using the German authority files for names (PND), subject headings (SWD) and institutions (GKD) and also frequently updated and checked for dead links. Up to now 900 resources have been catalogued and annotated in SavifaGuide; mostly in English, but also in many Indian languages, e.g. there are about 70 Urdu resources, 50 Bengali websites, 70 Tamil websites and many more. To make SavifaGuide a useful research tool also for users outside Germany, the DublinCore Metadata Element Set as well as the research environment of the database was realized in German and English.

- **Metasearch**: The metasearch allows to search for different types of information in online catalogues of selected German libraries with substantial South Asian holdings, such as Heidelberg University Library, Tübingen University Library, the Berlin State Library, and Göttingen State and University Library, as well as databases referring to South Asian Studies. Users get an integrated list of their results with links leading back to the original database for viewing the full bibliographic entry, for access to document delivery services or for direct access to the full-text.

- **OLC-SSG South Asia**: In cooperation with the Common Library Network GBV the library of the South Asia Institute has set up the bibliographic article database OLC-SSG South Asia. The Online Contents Service of the Special Subject Collection South Asia currently offers access to table of contents of about 216 journals relevant to the study and research on culture, politics and languages of South Asia. The journals are indexed back to the year 1993; thus the database contains approximately 113.311 records of journal articles and reviews. The database is a subject oriented selection of bibliographic data from the Swets Database Online Contents. It is regularly enlarged by table of contents data from additional periodicals out of the special subject collections of the Library of the South Asia Institute. Because of weekly updates and because we supply the bibliographic data from our journals as we receive them to the GBV, OLC-SSG South Asia contains more up-to-date information than most other bibliographic

databases. Furthermore, OLC-SSG South can not only be used as a bibliographic database, but also as an access point to interlibrary loan and document delivery services.

- **SavifaDok**: SavifaDok, the Open Access document server of Savifa - the Virtual Library South Asia, is an electronic platform for publishing and archiving academic literature in the field of South Asian studies. The publication platform offers free access to full-text documents and adheres to the principles of Open Access as well as the goals of the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI). People with a research interest in South Asia may publish their work in electronic format and make it available through the World Wide Web. Thereby, SavifaDok guarantees long-term availability and visibility of the documents in library catalogues (e.g. KVK-Karlsruher Virtual Catalogue) and search engines by using standardized addresses and metadata. We publish books, articles and research papers as well as multi media documents.

Given the shortness of time it is almost impossible to present all features of Savifa in great detail; so let me just quickly add that in cooperation with the Regensburg University Library we offer a selection of e-journals with a focus on South Asia via the e-journal library, i. e. the EZB and within the next weeks we'll integrate a similar service for databases via DBIS, the database info system. Our newsletter Masala – quarterly published - provides information on conferences, exhibitions, lectures, book reviews and new developments on Savifa. At the end of 2006 our scholars and project database will be online. This database will contain information on and addresses of persons and institutions with a research interest in the area. Various browsing options such as region, language and area of interest as well as a free keyword search will make the information easily retrievable.

## 4. Outlook for future developments

In order to improve the electronic references of print publications in South Asian studies, we intend to incorporate more library catalogues in our metasearch in the near future. Of particular interest for historical research on South Asia are three catalogues of the British Library, which cover the holdings of India Office Private

Paper, Prints & Drawings and Photographs within the Library's Asia, Pacific and African collections. Equally, incorporating the catalogues of large South Asian collections in North American libraries would result in a better visibility of those holdings in Germany and would give researchers a reliable base of information on which to pursue their work.

Because library catalogues have the double function of providing information on the holdings of a specific library and bibliographic information, a single catalogue that lists South Asian holdings in European and North American libraries would be highly desireable. As my colleague Avinash Maheshwary has already pointed out, the Digital South Asia Library (DSAL) has set up a project for compiling a South Asian Union Catalogue. Such a catalogue would not only serve as the basis for interlibrary loan with libraries inside and outside Europe and North America, but could also help to set preservation priorities and make selection decisions on the basis of information about library holdings that will be represented in this catalogue. "Preservation" leads me to the last point in my talk.

In 1998 – thanks to research contacts with the successors of the famous Lucknow-based publisher Naval Kishore – a substantial collection of early South Asian imprints from this publishing house came to the library of the South Asia Institute. The publications date from between 1870 to 1930, approximately 80 titles are publications in Persian on such topics as Persian grammar, sufism, poetry, administrative handbooks, etc. Around 130 titles are written in the regional language Urdu and another 110 titles are Hindi and Sanskrit publications. Together with another 400 to 500 hundred titles we received on 53 microfilms from Tübingen University Library our Naval Kishore collection is a representative selection of the production of this Press during the latter part of the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th. All the more valuable, if one takes into consideration that most South Asian library collections in Germany have been built mostly since the 1950s or 60s. Because research interest was and in parts still is mainly directed towards "Classical Indology", holdings of publications in the classical languages Sanskrit and Pali are reasonably strong, whereas holdings of earlier published work especially in the regional languages are quite rare. So, e.g. one finds many secondary works on Hariscandra of Banaras, the father of modern Hindi, but virtually none of his

primary texts. As scholars are opening up new areas of research using publications in modern South Asian languages as source material, the emphasis on imprints in regional languages has become particularly important.

From the point of view of preservation there is urgent need for action to preserve those valuable early examples of publishing activities in North India. We therefore intend to set up a project for digitizing them in the near future and to make them accessible for everybody on our electronic platform hosted by Heidelberg University Library. Other libraries with Naval Kishore holdings could join us in our efforts by digitizing their holdings or by adding holding information to the bibliographic records and thereby supplementing the data on the web.

Partnership could mean being engaged in setting up and working on projects together, it could also mean sharing common resources but above all it means communication with colleagues working in the field. With this I would like to close my paper and thank you very much for your attention!