

# COLLECTION OVERVIEW

## SOUTH ASIA STUDIES

### I. SCOPE

This statement describes Library of Congress holdings of materials produced in or having to do with the seven major nation-states comprising South Asia. South Asia includes Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. Research-quality publications are acquired for all of these countries in all subject fields, with the exception of the more technical aspects of agriculture and medicine covered by National Agricultural Library and the National Library of Medicine. About twenty major modern and classical languages are represented in the Library's holdings from the region, and at least two hundred languages or dialects with fewer works. In addition to printed sources, the Library has outstanding collections of recorded music, poetry readings, and maps, and selective collections of motion pictures and other special materials. The legal collections for the states of this area are comprehensive, and for India include those on the state level as well as the national level. The other countries of the region have more or less unitary governments.

### II. SIZE

For some 200 years up until the mid-twentieth century, all but a few of the modern nation-states of South Asia were governed in whole or part by Western European trading powers. History thus accounts for both the media of communication and the lacunae characteristic of this area. Pre-World-War II European-language publications pertaining to South Asia are chiefly in English, with smaller but still very large numbers in French, German, Portuguese, and various other European languages. The modern states of South Asia continue to produce a very high percentage of English-language publications for official, literary, and scholarly purposes. All such Western-language publications are treated as part of the Library's general collections and shelved by subject. They number approximately 500,000 volumes. The South Asia collections within the Asian Division include approximately 220,000 titles (250,000 volumes) of monographs and almost 4000 serial titles (14,000 volumes), active and inactive, in inkprint. There are also about 70,000 titles (350,000 fiche) in microfiche, counting monographs and serials together. These have almost entirely been produced by the photoduplication unit of the Library's New Delhi overseas office; a small number are commercial microfiche. Finally, there are about 400 titles in microfilm (15,000) reels. These are mostly newspapers in the modern languages, plus the debates of parliaments and state governments, and a few magazines.

### **III. GENERAL RESEARCH STRENGTHS**

The Library has very strong collections about South Asia in every field except those areas of agriculture and medicine for which the National Agricultural Library and the National Library of Medicine are responsible (there is of course overlap in some areas, such as public health and non-Western medical systems). One of the strengths is in government publications, perhaps even excelling the British Library in publications of the post-colonial governments, though inferior in the colonial imprints. The copyright collections have made the collections extremely strong in publications covering American missionary efforts and popular non-fiction and fiction about the subcontinent, including children's books - areas that not all research libraries would cover. Probably the best collection of South Asian recorded music outside the region is held by the Library. The New Delhi field office has acquired extensively in this field since the offices opened, and at one point seems to have acquired all of the 78 rpm recordings produce by Columbia and His Master's Voice between the wars, when both companies worked extensively in South Asia. A collection of South Asian vernacular language serials since 1962, in inkprint and microform, may be the best in the world.

The traditional Library of Congress strength in government agency publications acquired through long-standing exchanges, and in American publications acquired through copyright and British publications acquired though blanket order, has been added to during the past sixty-two years (as of 2008) by comprehensive regional acquisition programs conducted by the Library's field offices opened in India and Pakistan in 1962. These offices have implemented broad-ranging acquisitions efforts covering the widest variety of languages and subjects in all parts of the South Asia region. Post-1962 holdings for most of this region can therefore be said to be outstanding.

### **IV. ELECTRONIC RESOURCES**

South Asia has not moved as fast into developing electronic resources, whether online or in CD-ROMs, as might be expected from the growth of India into a major power in programming and the supply of information technology services. The Library has (according to the Voyager Cataloging module) only 440 electronic resources from the region, of which 329 are from India and 111 from the remaining six countries. There are none of the gigantic projects of digitization for online access that the Far Eastern nations have produced. However, some of the products in CD-ROM format are both large and important, notably the Census of India. Moreover, many sectors of the Government of India are making documents available online at a rapid pace. Similarly, many South Asian newspapers and magazines publish free-access online versions, which will be added to the country portals. One promising development is the increased numbers of South Asian serials being added in the standard online indexes. Since other American libraries receive almost all of their CD-ROMs from the India and Pakistan offices of the Library, these holdings will be less than the Library's.

## V. AREAS OF DISTINCTION

The Library's collection of South Asian government documents is extremely extensive, through exchanges with the British colonial governments and exchange or purchase from the independent governments.

The collection of vernacular serials since 1962 may be the best in the world if one takes into account the coverage of all languages, countries, and subjects. The British Library and the Indian Office Library (now incorporated into the British Library) only acquired samples in this area. There are some serials to which the Library's subscription begins in 1939 or just after the Second World War, and even a few from the mid-nineteenth century, produced by American missionary presses.

Deficiencies in the collection of books in the modern vernacular languages have been much alleviated by the Microforming of Indian Publications Project (a.k.a. South Asia Microform Project Early Twentieth-Century Indian Books Project), collaboration with CRL and other American institutions, plus the Government of India. In this project the Delhi office has sent microfilm cameras to a number of major Indian institutions to microfilm the books listed in the Sahitya Akademi's authoritative National Bibliography of Indian Literature, 1901-1953, a work which covers works in all subjects in all the officially recognized languages of India (most of which are also found in Pakistan and Bangladesh).

The South Asian Literary Recordings Project features South Asian authors from most of the countries in the region, in twenty-one languages, reading selections chosen by the authors from their own works, available freely on the Web on the Delhi office's page for anyone to listen to. These recordings were prepared by the Delhi overseas office using tapes earlier made by the Pakistan office.

Another unusual strength of the collections is the number of pamphlets, stray issues of magazines, and other materials microfiched by the Delhi office, and made available for purchase from the Photoduplication service. These collections were made of materials that had been accumulating in Washington since the early twentieth century, plus current acquisitions by the India and Pakistan offices. Examples of subjects of the collections are political pamphlets issued by parties or individuals, caste histories and magazines, women's issues, the aerospace industry, cultural institutions, early tourist promotion literature, and religious controversies. As of late 2008, there are almost 1900 such collections. The materials are cataloged in the online catalog with item lists available on the Delhi office's web page.

The Library has not systematically collected South Asian manuscripts, but through purchases and gifts at various times, has acquired approximately 700 in various languages, the largest number being in Sanskrit and Urdu. The most notable of these is a birch bark scroll in the extinct Gandhari language, which may be the oldest intact book from South Asia in existence, dating back to 200 B.C. This scroll consists of a list of names of successive Buddhas. The "Crosby fragments" are portions of what were once

Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit texts antedating approximately 1000 A.D., when the town in which they were discovered was destroyed by Arabs. These special items were purchased at the beginning of the twentieth century in the region of Khotan, along what was once the “silk route” in western China, by the American businessman and traveler Oscar Terry Crosby, and deposited in the Library early in the twentieth century.

Another important manuscript, also Buddhist, may be one of the ten oldest Nepalese manuscripts. Written on palm leaves, with beautiful illustrations, this Buddhist sutra is from the Prajnaparamita literature. Finally, there is a manuscript of Narayana Pandita’s *Ganitakaumudi*, an important medieval work on mathematics, of which only three other copies are known. The Library’s copy is especially important because the diagrams accompanying the text differ from those in the published edition. Also, in 1904, the Library purchased the library of Albrecht Weber, one of the greatest Sanskritists of the nineteenth century, at a time when classical Indology was practically at the center of the scholarly world. Although this institution did not receive most of his papers, but acquisition included his abundant notes and correspondence put into his printed books, and the files on the Fifth International Congress of Orientalists, Berlin, 1881. These writings illustrate the personal and scholarly collaborations and oppositions of scholars in many fields, such as the American Sanskritist and lexicographer William Dwight Whitney, the German-English Sanskritist Max Muller, the French Semiticist and writer on religion Renan, and the German classicist Willamowitz. An American collector has gifted the Library to date with approximately 60,000 legal documents on stamped paper from Indian princely states that illustrate the legal and commercial life of these states; states that constituted about one-third of the population of the British Raj.

The Library’s collection of the classical language of pre-Islamic India, Sanskrit, Pali, and Prakrit, is probably as good as any library with the possible exception of the British Library. This collection is essentially all British and American publications of the last two centuries, written in French, German, and the other languages of European learning, and a large proportion of what was in print in the 1940s and later. Still, because of the immense quantity of editions in these languages, there are many additional titles or editions that the Library lacks for the collections.

## **VI. WEAKNESSES/EXCLUSIONS**

Like other American libraries, the Library is not as strong as one would wish in vernacular literature for the period antedating World War II, and especially for the nineteenth century. Acquisitions trips, field office efforts and projects in cooperation with other American libraries promise gradually to improve these collections. One example of the last is the Center for Research Library’s South Asia Microform Project for the preservation on film of otherwise unavailable resources, of which the Library is a full member. Strict antiquities laws in some of the countries, plus the lack of book finding services for antiquarian books, make filling in the gaps for early imprints more difficult, but sometimes significant collections become available in countries outside the region, and also books may be purchased, microformatted in the overseas offices, and the inkprint donated to local institutions.