Archive and Access

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History and the Region: The Colonial Archive

Introduction:

A continuing concern amongst historians is the sacred space of the archive. Theoretical considerations of the archive aside, historians from quite different schools of thought and practice are bonded by laments about lost and decaying sources and complaints about inefficient and excessively bureaucratic archival staff. Scholars based in India worry about the condition of archives in different parts of the country, and anxiously look for grants to access better kept collections at the British Library in London, and elsewhere. A few have, in recent years, begun to work on attempting to democratize access to collections that are located abroad [through state sponsored acquisition, or through international digitization projects] and on furthering the possibility of exchanges between archives in India, and those located in private and public repositories in other parts of the world. These developments have largely been separate from scholarly work on the archive. Focusing on the regional archive, this chapter will dwell on both kinds of issues, suggesting also that these are questions that should be considered in totality, rather than relegating one to the sphere of policy, and the other to scholarship.

The chapter begins with a consideration of some of the theoretical and historical literature on the archive. The literature has in different ways dispelled or least strongly questioned notions of the archive as an unbiased repository of historical facts; building blocks which merely need to be accessed to write objective histories. The chapter draws on the insights of work of this kind which have for the most part focused on the colonial archive. It calls for the extension of these reflections not merely to other kinds of archives but also to the colonial archive in the post colonial context. It then turns to the specific instance of the regional archive in India, in particular to the Tamil Nadu Archives located in Chennai (formerly Madras). It will situate the Tamil Nadu Archives, which is most importantly the repository for documents from the British period in south India, in the present day institutional and political context. In particular, the

chapter considers how state archives delineate the notion of the archival region, a category that in practice cannot contain or explain the complicated and entangled nature of the possessions of these archives. The chapter ends with a brief consideration of the kind of intervention that the Internet might constitute in an archive of this sort, and the possible implications of the same for the writing of regional histories, and for thinking about the relationship between institutions like the archive and social memory.

While the absorption with the conservation and preservation of precious records continues unabated, there has been in recent years a move away from the notion of the archive as a passive repository of neutral information to be mined by scholars for their content. Increasingly, the archives are being explained as sites where power is articulated, negotiated and even contested. These are places of social memory, which have the power to control, or at least influence what is remembered about the past, and what is forgotten, places that shape the collective memories of communities and nations. If one turns explicitly to the scholarship on South Asia, it becomes apparent that while work that directly focuses on the archive as a theoretical concept is relatively small in number, the recognition of the archive as a site of power has influenced, as we shall see, different strands of history writing, in particular those that deal with South Asia's colonial past.

In 1994, the deconstructionist Jacques Derrida gave the archive its place in critical theory. Derrida uses Freudian psychoanalysis to explain the archive as inextricably linked to the authority of beginnings, and to the longings for the originary and the primary. Derrida's archive is not the historian's documentary archive; instead it is a metaphor that would encompass modern information technology.[1] For Michel Foucault, again what is important is not the historian's archive — instead what is of significance are the conditions that have made the archive possible. Foucault's archive is the structure, the rules that characterize discursive practice that determines what can be said and what cannot be said. It is the system that governs the appearance of statements as historical events. Needless to say, while Foucault did not deal with the physical repository of material documents, his insights about the archive as a site of revealed

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[1] See Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1995.

power have influenced the ways in which historians have dealt with, and written about the archive.[2]

Historians have addressed the issue of the archive, in various ways, and for some time now – certainly well before Derrida made his famous pronouncements on archive fever. Thus, over the last couple of decades at least, we have seen a spate of critical work by historians from different parts of the world that explore themes that include the consideration of questions of power in the making of different kinds of archives, to that of historical evidence, the practices of history writing, and the formation of collective memories.[3] The truth claims of the archive have been questioned as has the notion of an objective scientific history. Debates about the production of the historical narrative have for one meant there are relatively few takers for positivism within the discipline.[4] This rethinking of the neutrality of the archive has been bolstered by work in the history of science, where scholars like Mary Poovey and Stephen Shapin have looked at the social history of the scientific fact and questions of authority and validation; who determines and what gets accepted as truth?[5]

The important place of the archive in the determination of historical truth, and what is accepted as history by individuals, communities and nations is one that has exercised scholars in different ways. In his monumental seven volume series on the construction of the French past, Pierre Nora argues that like museums or memorials, archives are "sites of memory", where "[cultural] memory crystallizes and secretes itself". [6] In order to understand that the archive does not merely produce an objective narrative of "what happened", it has become necessary to interrogate or at any rate understand the narrator whether the state, a business corporation or a

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[2] See in particular, Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* Oxford: Routledge, 1969.

[3] For an overview of the literature on the subject see Francis X Blouin Jnr and William G Rosenberg (ed), *Archives, Documentation and Institutions of Social Memory,* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997; also Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, "Archives, Records and Power: The Making of Modern Memory", *Archival Science*, Vol 2, 2002: 1-19.

[4] See in particular, Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973 and *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.

[5] Mary Poovey*, A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998; Stephen Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Nineteenth Century England,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

[6] Nora, Pierre, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire" *Representations* 26, Spring 1989: 7-25. L. D. Kritzman and P. Nora (eds) *Realms of Memory: the construction of the French past*. Vols 1-3. New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press: 1996-1998.

family. The elision of questions of power in the creation of the archive has been critiqued through case studies that have focused on a range of time periods, regions and institutions. Jacques Le Goff, a historian in his work on the relationship between the consolidation of political power by monarchs in the ancient world and the establishment of the earliest archives comments that "the document is not objective, innocent raw material but expresses past society's power over memory and over the future: the document is what remains."[7] There has also been an increasing focus on those marginalized by the historical archive (and consequently, the search for sources other than those of the state and other dominant institutions). A feminist scholar, Gerda Lerner for instance, has argued that women have been systematically excluded from mainstream historical records from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century.[8]

More recent scholarship engages with the issue of historical production in its entirety; what is underlined is not merely what is recorded, and what is not, but the negotiations, contestations and elisions that take place at different moments of retrieval by historians from the archive. One of the most important and moving examples of work that examines the relationship between power and the production of the historical past in the non-western context has been Michel Rolph-Trouillot's *Silencing the Past*. Focusing on the Haitian Revolution, the book argues that this monumental event has been silenced in western historiography, and that this elision can be traced to every step in its [non] production, from the creation of primary documents to that of the archive, to the writing of historical narratives "History is the fruit of power," according to Trouillot, and this power is reflected in the "ways in which the production of historical narratives involved the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production."[9]

It is not surprising that there has been a focus on the colonial state and its archives in the revisionist literature that focuses on the power of the archive and its relationship to the production of history. The assumptions and biases of the colonial archive and the ways in which it has been organized have been the object of much scrutiny and revealed to be gendered, racist

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[7] Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory,* New York, Columbia University Press, 1992, Preface, xvii.
[8] Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness from the Middle Ages to Eighteen Seventy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
[9] Michel - Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.

and hierarchical. Above all, this scholarship emphasizes that the colonial archive existed to validate and serve colonial power. In his telling study, Thomas Richards discusses the ways in which the Victorian empire was based on a close relationship between knowledge and power. Focusing on fields like biology, geology and geography, Richards calls the imperial archive a fantasy of knowledge collected for the service of the empire.[10] Colonial archives, thus, as the anthropologist Ann Stoler has pointed out recently are "both sites of the imaginary and institutions that fashioned histories as they concealed, revealed and reproduced the power of the state.[11] While acknowledging its significance, other recent work has argued that there can be no easy reading of the colonial archive, created as it was by administrators and ideologues at differing levels, and at different points of time, dealing with the every day work of maintaining order and controlling the subject population. Stoler's own work for example, has emphasized the shifting, and often complicated nature of colonial ideologies and practices; in her work on the nature of colonial documents in the Dutch East Indies, she argues that the imperial archive was in fact, a confused, and an often conflicted epistemic space.[12]

For its entire obsession with British colonialism, there has been relatively little work in the context of South Asia that directly considers the theoretical status of the colonial archive. It is indeed the case that some of the most influential historical scholarship on South Asia was witness to a fruitful dialogue between history and anthropology, with the archive frequently being invoked. However, this invocation was, for the most part to underline the perfidiousness of the colonial archive, to reveal its elitism and its treachery in silencing the voice of the subaltern. Thus, in the 1980s and early 90s, members of the early Subaltern School urged historians to actively read "against the grain" in order to recover the voices of peasant rebels from the colonial archive. Here, subalternity is understood as residing within elite discourses and not outside it. Subaltern historians, therefore, read colonial records in ways that allow them to recover the myths, ideologies and resistance of the subaltern that traditional historiography, whether nationalist or colonialist had erased from its narratives.[13] Thus, Ranajit Guha in the "Prose of

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[10] Thomas Richards, *Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire,* London: Verso, 1993.
[11] See Ann Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance", *Archival Science,* Vol 2, 2002, 87-109.
[12] Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.
[13] For a useful compilation of articles on key issues in early Subaltern Studies, see chapters 1-11 of Vinayak Chaturvedi (ed), *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial,* London and New York: Verso, 2000.

Counter Insurgency" articulates his famous structuralist reading of the corpus of literature on peasant insurgency and argues that peasant consciousness is completely absent at different levels of discourse surrounding peasant rebellion, from colonial records produced in the aftermath of an event, to different schools of secondary historical literature on these incidents. [14]

In this project to recover subaltern agency, there is little interest in the specific historical nature of the state and its archive, it exists only in its biases that the historian needs to comprehend and contest. In work of this kind, the idea is not to, as Stoler recommends, reading the archive "along" its grain to historically understand its structures of meaning.[15] For some subalternists, one way of addressing this elision is to read colonial records alongside other kinds of accounts, particularly oral narratives that belong to subaltern communities. An example is the Shahid Amin's classic, *Event, Metaphor Memory* which re-examines Gandhian nationalism through the lens of the infamous Chauri Chaura incident in the course of the Non Cooperation Movement in 1922. Using official accounts, and oral testimony, the book examines the relationship between local memory and official histories. [16]

Amin is also one example of a Subaltern historian who has engaged critically with the colonial archive in terms of the ways in which it both enables and limits the voices of the subaltern, allowing him to speak and to not speak. His work on colonial law, in particular "Approver's Testimony, Judicial Discourse" scrutinizes the colonial archive by analyzing the creation of the necessarily self-implicating testimony and evidence by the approver in the famous Chauri Chaura incident that is structured by the legal discourse of a colonial court case. [17] Amin's work draws on similar endeavours by historians of Europe. In *Fiction in the Archives*, for instance, Natalie Zemon Davis looks at the "pardon tales" of petitioners in the sixteenth

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[14] See Ranajit Guha, "The Prose of Counter Insurgency" in *Subaltern Studies 2*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983: 1-42. Also, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India", Subaltern Studies 1, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982: 1-8; "The Small Voice of History", *Subaltern Studies 9*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996.

[15] See Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain* for its compelling arguments for "a politics of knowledge that deal with archival genres, cultures of documentation, fictions of access, and archival conventions", "Colonial Archives and Arts of Governance", 87-88.

[16] See for instance, Ajay Skaria, *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers and Wildness in Western India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999. Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992. A more recent example is that of Vinayak Chaturvedi, *Peasant Pasts: History and Memory in Western India*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007.

[17] See Amin, "Approvers Testimony, Judicial Discourse: The Case of Chauri Chaura", Subaltern Studies 5, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987, 166-202.

century France; in the classic *Cheese and the Worms,* Carlo Ginzburg examines the testimony of a peasant miller, Menoccio in the course of a trial for heresay during the Inquisition in the sixteenth century Italy. In both cases, the focus is on the ways these testimonies are created in very particular legal contexts, and social, moral and literary universes.[18]

Let us turn away from social history to an important strand of historical thinking that has been dominant particularly in the American academy that has focused on the formation of colonial knowledge in the context of South Asia. Scholarship of this kind has emphasized colonialism's role in the creation – or invention of, according to some - modern social identities and in that regard encourages critical questioning of the categories and taxonomies of the colonial archive. Close readings of the Orientalist scholarship, missionary literature, colonial ethnographies and documents of rule reveal the recognition [and imposition of] by the colonial state of social identities particularly those of caste and religion as an integral, defining feature of all of native society.[19] These scholars are concerned with colonialism as living presence as it informs and shapes the political life of the present. While there is a tendency perhaps to overemphasize the power of the colonial state to effect this degree of epistemological change, some of the best work of this kind has paid careful attention to the specific historical, intellectual contexts, both in India and in Europe, that have contributed to the creation of colonial knowledge and its categories at particular points of time. [20]

And finally, let us turn to the emerging body of scholarship that deals with the materiality of the [largely colonial archive] and focuses on themes that include studies of the native informants who helped colonial administrators and scholars whether orientalists or ethnographers compile and validate forms of knowledge, to the armies of clerks who literally produced the archive, and

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[18] See Natalie Zemon Davis*, Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France,* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987; Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller,* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1980.

[19] The classic, defining work in this field is that of Bernard Cohn. *See Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. Also, Ronald Inden, *Imagining India*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990; Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind, Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.

[20] Nicholas Dirks, for instance has argued that after the uprising of 1857, the colonial archive moved away from an investment in history (exemplified for instance by Colin Mackenzie's collection of folklore and textual materials on India) to ethnography. With its vast collection of manuals, surveys and gazetteers, the colonial archive, the supreme technology of what Dirks calls the "ethnographic state" now viewed the colonized through ascriptive categories like caste and religious identity. See Dirks, *Castes of Mind.*

facilitated rule by a regime of paper. The intermediaries in these accounts included Sanskrit and Persian *pundits* who worked with the orientalists,[21] to native informants like Kavelli Lutchmiah who famously assisted Colin Mackenzie.[22] According to scholars like Phillip Wagonor they qualify the notion of an all powerful state and any uncomplicated notion of colonial knowledge that in fact has been produced to a great extent by these intermediaries.[23] There has also been an increasing interest in the scribal communities who produced the physical artifacts that make up the colonial archive[24], to examinations of forms of imperial print and writing,[25] to that of archival genres like the petition.[26]

What has been conspicuously missing from the growing literature on the colonial archive in South Asia from a range of perspectives has been a serious consideration of its status in independent India – in other words, the colonial archive in the postcolonial context. Any reflection on the relationship between state power and the archive has, by and large been restricted to the colonial. [27] And yet, in spite of all its continuities with its colonial past, the ways in which these institutions are imagined, organized, funded and run by the postcolonial Indian state must inevitably impact the nature of historical scholarship that emanates from them. New systems of classification and sorting [which in fact, changed considerably during succeeding and different phases of colonial rule], the categorization of material as confidential and "secret", decisions on conservation schemes [including in recent times, what gets digitized and in what priority], decisions about language training for archivists – all of these both reflect and are constitutive of the nature and preoccupations of the state including importantly, its validation of certain versions of the past.

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[21] See Michael Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire and National Culture: India 1770-1880*, Delhi: Foundation Books, 2009.
[22] See Nicholas Dirks, "Colonial Histories and Native Informants: The Biography of an Archive" in Carol Breckenridge and Peter Van De Veer (eds), Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992.
[23] Phillip B. Wagoner, "Precolonial Intellectuals and the Production of Colonial Knowledge", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol 43, 2003, 783-786
[24] See Bhavani Raman, " The familial world of the Company's *kacceri* in early colonial Madras" *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History,* Vol 9, 2008.
[25] See for instance, Miles Ogburn, *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company, 1550-1800,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
[26] See for instance, Michael Katten, *Colonial Lists/Indian Power: Identity Politics in Nineteenth Century Telugu Speaking India*, New York: Columbia University Press 2002.
[27] This obviously has to be in addition to the official archives of independent India [which interestingly are often housed in the same repositories that hold colonial documents] and which need to be subject to the same critical gaze.

In this chapter, we will focus on the impact of one particularly important aspect of state building on archives in different parts of the country; since independence collections have been, and continue to be re-distributed according to the political logic of the time determined by events like the Partition and its aftermath, the reorganization of the country along linguistic lines in the 1950s, or the formation of new states, which is a recurring feature of political life in India. The logic of the modern archival region imposed on the colonial archive has had an impact which goes well beyond the realm of the logistical difficulties faced by scholars wishing to access it, to issues of history writing and the nature of historical consciousness about cultural and social identity.

Theories about the archive are not stable over time and region. It is important to keep in mind that they are ideologically charged spaces, which sees themselves and indeed, are understood as possessing a certain kind of relationship with both national and regional history, language and culture. Importantly, the colonial document archive is also the site where political and cultural claims are increasingly being staked, a phenomenon that that has grown in importance since the Right to Information Act in 2005. The nature of the archive as a legal entity in a democracy is one that requires serious consideration.

One of the mandates of this chapter is to reflect on the impact of new technology, in particular, digitization and the Internet on older document archives such as the ones we are looking at. Digitization and making the contents of an archive available online appears to have certain obvious advantages including solving the problems of space which plague many institutions, allowing users to bypass the often excessive bureaucracy associated with official archives, the creation not just of more efficient finding aids and other means of document retrieval but of the creation of lay users in places have been in past, the exclusive preserve of scholars.[28] In fact however, there is no easy tale of the liberating impact of digital and Internet

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[28] It is important to note that a digital resource in an archive [a printed document or manuscript that has been scanned and made computer readable] does not necessarily imply that the item has been made available to the user on the world-wide web. In the global knowledge economy, well endowed private archives in the west have the resources to digitize their collections but access is restricted to fee paying members in India. While many state archives in India (like the TNA) have begun to digitize their resources, few if any will consent to having their collections or even guides or indices being made available online.

technology on the archive. The digital divide aside, the politics of conservation [including issues of priority and funding] and the ease with which concealment, or even alteration can take place in fact enhances state power instead of diminishing it. In addition, legal issues including those of ownership and copyright have become increasingly important in the digital [not to mention litigious] age. Thus, through the case study in this chapter, we will underline that issue here is not merely one of the most efficient means of the preservation of documents; it is one of the constitution of historical evidence and collective memory.

II Rethinking the Region

The regional state archive [as opposed to the National Archives] in India is a mysterious and complicated entity to say the very least. There is little uniformity in the functioning of state archives in different parts of the country and in their relationships with the National Archives of India as well as with other state archives or with provincial and district record offices. They embody different [and often shifting, depending on political context] relationships with national history as well as with the historical imagination of the region that it is supposed to represent.

In this paper, I am primarily but not exclusively concerned with the Tamil Nadu State Archives[29] located across the road from the bustling railway station in the locality of Egmore in Chennai. The TNA contains the records of the East India Company in South India and post 1857, those of the British Raj. It also contains a multitude of other valuable collections including those of the Dutch in South India, of the Nawab of Arcot and several donated private collections about which I will say more presently. Even as I stress its importance as one of the largest and richest research centres in South Asia, it must be said that the Citizen's Charter of the TNA also makes it clear that the archive's main role is an administrative one – it is used by the public to access copies of government orders, information relating to landed property, etc.[30]

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[29] Hereafter TNA.
[30] See http://www.tn.gov.in/citizen/archives.html.

Indeed, my first intention in writing this paper was to try and engage with the issue of digitization in the regional archive in connection with the land records (old survey and settlement records) that the TNA has in its possession. As the Charter points out, and as I was told repeatedly during my visit to the TNA, the archives merely hold the records in safe-keeping for the Revenue Department. If someone wants to trace the title of his landed property, or determine its boundaries, or enquire about the history of the land, she can apply for a grant of certified copies of such records. These copies however, are granted and released by the Commissioner of Revenue Administration or the Director of Survey and Land Records and not the TNA itself. In fact, so strict are these boundaries that the digitization schemes launched to conserve these records are separate from those covering other collections of the TNA. Since the procedure to acquire copies of these land records appear to be fairly straightforward (and is further being facilitated by the ongoing process of digitization), it struck me as interesting that a sort of back-door business in acquiring photocopies of old land records by litigants in land disputes [usually at the village level] is a feature at the TNA. On enquiry, I was told that the photocopied records being acquired in this way had little connection with the cases being pursued or the area under litigation. The value of these records lay in their symbolic significance and in the fact of their antiquity. The importance of the archive therefore, lay not merely in what it contains or even as a crucial institution in a documentary legal regime. Indeed, it is clear that these records could not be produced as evidence in any formal legal context; but they clearly carried weight in more informal arenas of mediation. Several interesting questions about the materiality and the visual significance of evidence can be raised in this context but I soon realized that attempts at ethnography on this subject — trying to talk to litigants in land disputes to enquire about their experiences with the acquisition of land records at the TNA or about the ways in which different kinds of documents functioned in these disputes, symbolically and otherwise —was an extremely difficult and long drawn one that involved reluctant interviewees and disapproving members of staff. With some prudence, I decided therefore, to forego an examination of the subcultures that archives invariably spawn and focus directly on the institution itself. Nevertheless, the issue raises important questions regarding the status, legal and otherwise, of different kinds of holdings in the state archive. Here in the TNA, a dichotomy

has been made between documents deemed important for research, and those of administrative importance that are to be handled directly by the government, rather than by the archive itself.

I turn therefore, to the career of the TNA in independent India, to consider the extent to which the modern political context has had an impact on the nature of the institution. These issues are not by any means restricted to the TNA, but its particularities are of course shaped by the political and social history of the Tamil region. I then turn to the question of the possibilities that the Internet offers to the archive. Here, I am not primarily concerned with issues of access, but with the relationship between the regional archive and regional history. I mainly, but not exclusively use the lens of the private record collection in the state – in particular the TNA — to consider some of these issues.

Today, one of the less known functions of state archives in India is the periodic acquisition of records from the general public at regular intervals. Not surprisingly, the most frenetic activity of this kind took place in the decades after independence in different parts of the country. Individuals and families, some belonging to important political and royal lineages donated their collections of records, manuscripts and other documents to the state for safe-keeping. These voluntary contributions which were sometimes solicited by the archives themselves through periodic advertisements were felt (both by the archival custodians and presumably by the donators) to have cultural and political significance: and what could be better than that the document repositories of the new nation be responsible for these? In addition, teams were dispatched by different archives to literally scour the towns and countryside for collections that could be significant additions to the holdings of regional archives. Importantly the politics of the acquisition of private records was complicated, and invariably changed over time. For one, there is the issue of what the governors and administrators of different regional archives thought – and think — are appropriate and useful additions to their institutions; the ways in which a collection is recognized as having national or regional significance, and the tensions and possible contradictions in these perceptions; and the relationship, legal and otherwise that those who have made these donations have with the archives as well as with the collections that they have handed over to the guardianship of the state.

Before I turn to the TNA, let me first refer to a visit to the Delhi State Archives[31] last year where in fact, I had my first conversation about the nature and acquisition of private collections. As in other places, contributions in the form of personal donations to the archive are few and far between nowadays, although I was told that periodic advertisements soliciting contributions were still being published in the city's newspapers from time to time. Curious, I asked to see one of these advertisements, but after a good deal of rummaging in various drawers took place, a copy could not be found for me to look at. But I was firmly and explicitly informed that while the Delhi Archives was a repository for manuscripts and other documents "of significance to Delhi", it was emphatically not interested in what was of "national significance". Materials of the latter kind, I was told, were to be given to the National Archives of India and indeed, various potential contributors had been in the past told to approach that august body instead of the Delhi State Archives. The same principle was followed in the archive's own initiatives to survey, list and acquire collections that were "of Delhi's interest" from other regional archives including those of Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Haryana as well as private records in the form of "historical manuscripts, documents, paintings, maps, farmans, sanads, parwanas and rare books etc. dating back to the Mughal period".[32]

The details of this somewhat curious policy remained ambiguous and slightly unclear. As the person in charge of the acquisition of manuscripts was away, I was not able to obtain more information about how contributions are determined to be of importance to the Delhi archive or not, the details of the processes by which they were and are obtained, or see a list of what in fact had been acquired in this way over the years. Regardless, however, the question of how a document was presumed to be of national importance, or of importance to the city of Delhi alone

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[31] The Delhi State Archives, located in the Qutub Institutional Area in New Delhi falls under the Art and Culture Sector of the Delhi Government. Its lists its functions as relating to the survey, acquisition and proper preservation of cultural heritage of Delhi in the shape of documents, manuscripts, rare books, maps and others materials for administrative use and the purposes of historical research. The archive also houses and preserves records which are 25 years old (or less) of a permanent nature that belong to the departments of the Delhi Government. For more details, see: delhiplanning.nic.in/write-up/2005-06/volume-2/ac.doc.doc.

[32] See *delhiplanning.nic.in/write-up/2005-06/volume-2/ac.doc.doc*

was one which I found particularly intriguing, not least because the Delhi State Archives and the National Archives of India are located in the same city.

For instance, if one looks at the prize holdings of the Delhi Archives, it seems perfectly understandable that the documents pertaining to the setting up of Delhi as the imperial capital be housed there. But what of the Mutiny Papers or the documents relating to the trial of the Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar that comprises some of the most important possessions of the Delhi Archives? Was it possible that the administrators of the Delhi Archives were echoing the objections raised by revisionists against the position taken by nationalist historians who claimed that the Revolt of 1857 was in fact the First War of Indian Independence, and that the old Mughal Emperor was the leader of the newly emerging nation?[33]

Exhibitions are an important part of the Delhi Archive's stated aims of raising "the consciousness of the citizens of Delhi." [34] One of its major successes was a grand exhibition on the Revolt of 1857 held in July 2008 that seemed to suggest that the archive's insistent emphasis on the history of Delhi was not an idle claim. While the monumental national significance of the Revolt of 1857 was acknowledged in bold letters on the pamphlet advertising the event (thus dashing my fond hope that the Delhi Archive was in fact indulging in a revisionist reading of the event), it stressed that the Revolt was a lens to understanding the political and cultural history of Delhi. Thus, the exhibition of " contemporary drawings, photographs, newspaper clippings, private collections and other material from the Delhi Archives" was entitled "Delhi in the First War of India's Independence, 1857" [insert image][35]. It did not contradict the idea that the Revolt in general was an event of national importance, but emphasized that as far as the Delhi Archives was concerned what was of supreme importance was the uprising as it pertained to the city.

Curiously, the Delhi Archives appears to function quite autonomously as far as the acquisition of private records is concerned and works primarily through the sporadic initiatives of those in charge of the archive. It was unclear to me why this was the case, whether it had

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[33] For a summary of some of the historiographical debates over 1857 see Biswamoy Pati, *The 1857 Rebellion*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007.

[34] *delhiplanning.nic.in/write-up/2005-06/volume-2/ac.doc.doc*

[35] See Image 1, Appendix.

always been so, and whether the reason why it was so was a matter of official policy or convention. The case of the TNA is quite different. From its inception, the TNA has acquired private collections through the Regional Committees for the Survey of Historical Records appointed by the National Archives of India. These Committees, whose members include the Assistant Commissioners and Collectors of District Record Offices in different parts of the country, are the decision makers as far as private records are concerned; further, a registry of these records is maintained at the National Archives. According to the Citizen's Charter of the TNA, the Committee's aim is to "to survey and collect the rare records of historical administrative, legal and fiscal value in the hands of private persons to strengthen the history of India and to bring to light such records… to preserve them for posterity. These records have to specifically pertain to the period before 1947; examples of contributions that would be welcome include 'palm leaves, copper plates, letters of high dignitaries, deeds, correspondence volumes, books, journals, etc., relating to the freedom movement, photos, any assignment of lands to the East India Company, or the British, religious customs, endowment of property to any charitable purpose, deed of Zamins, Polygars, Newabs, Samasthanams, Rajas, any notable events in the British Rule, etc". [36]

The functioning of these Regional Commitees appears to be fairly infrequent these days, in particular in comparison to the 1960s and 1970s. The TNA however has kept track of its acquisitions over the years, and I was able to access a partial list – unfortunately, however the names of the contributors were missing from it. The listed collections included the Pudukottai Residency records; various zamindari records including for instance, Sengampatti and Ramnad; Portuguese documents (Regimento Auditorio; Ecclesiastico de Archbispado Primacial de Goa Eda Sua Relocao Anno 1810); a collection of papers relating to the late Chief Minister and film actor MG Ramachandran (MGR); autographs and photos of nationalist leaders as well as sundry Hindi and Persian documents. The criterion for accepting contributions from the public was above all, their age. In fact, apparently many a contributor [and this was in reference to a time when the donation of private collections to the TNA was a much more frequent practice] was turned away when the collections concerned pertained to the post independence period [the MGR papers being, of course, an notable exception to this rule]. Private records at the TNA did

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[36] http://www.tn.gov.in/citizen/archives.html

not have to adhere to any strict standards of being important to some idea of the Tamil region, which accounts perhaps for the eclectic collections that have been contributed to the archive over the years.

There is another index of private collections located in different parts of the Tamil country that was generated by the TNA: this is the National Register of Private Records received from the TNA by the National Archives of India. A brief perusal of the National Register for the 1960s and 1970s are testament to the astonishing richness of material as well as to the zeal with which the post Independence administrators of the TNA set out on the task of collecting private records deemed of historical value. Indeed, the history of these state sponsored surveys that were to throw light on the culture of the region [and the nation] and the complex ways in which they were carried out deserve to be told in their own right, as much as any tale of colonial ethnography. The collections being referred to were in printed, manuscript and palm leaf form in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Persian, Modi, English and Arabic and included official farmans, reports, correspondence, judgements; memoirs of personalities including caste leaders, religious heads, missionaries and zaminadars; temple and matha records; church and mission records; ballads, songs, stories and folklore in different forms; and local and caste histories. It is unclear whether the TNA which was certainly involved in the making of this elaborate index which included extensive and detailed notes regarding each collection actually acquired some or any of them or assumed some sort of guardianship over time.

Clearly however, private records are seen as a category that is distinct from that of the other holdings of the TNA. One stark way in which this was apparent is in terms of what is a recurring function of the TNA, something that I will discuss in greater detail in the next section. There is little sign of any process being put into place for the redistribution of these records along the lines of present day archival regions determined and defined by modern state boundaries within South India, something that was carried out for the TNA's normal holdings [with the exception of the land records mentioned earlier]. Given the nature of the private records in the possession, they could easily be claimed by other regional archives but no action of that sort has been taken given that there is no clarity about the rights that the TNA has over these documents.

The ambiguity of the legal status of private records in the TNA becomes important in connection with the issue of the conservation of records, in particular in the light of the recent schemes to systematically digitize the contents of the archive. It is significant that despite the fact that the collection of private records would clearly be in official parlance, "of significance" to different regional archives, the question of making claims to them do not arise. Indeed, what is striking about the state of private record collections in public, state institutions is the lack of any sort of formal legal arrangements between the families that possess the collections and the institutions which wish to acquire them. This is particularly important because these collections often possess sentimental or other kinds of value for the families, which have to be acknowledged and respected even as they become part of public repository. The most that the Citizens's Charter of the TNA does is to acknowledge, albeit briefly, the fear on the part of those donating these records that these might be snatched away from them by the state. The arrangement between the owner of the collection and the TNA is summarized thus: **"Every person may either hand over the original to the archives as the records will be preserved for centuries by adopting scientific methods or they can retain the original with them and allow totake a xerox copy of such records for preservation in the archives. If they hand over the original, they will be given access to peruse the original at any time in the Archives and can take return of the original by leaving a xerox copy." As a result of the ambiguity about the legal status of these records and their relationship with the TNA, private records appear to have been overlooked in schemes to digitize the collections of the archive.**

In many ways, the marginalized private record represents the possibilities that the regional archive extends to its user, possibilities that extend beyond the official record and which are indicative of the seldom tapped depth and complexity of the archive. Many of these records are those that belong to kings and zamindars, now subject to the authority of the British. In these records we see the continued articulation of notions of kingship and authority which were very different from that of the colonial state. Their existence is an important corrective to the idea of the colonial archive as a monument to the overwhelming power of the colonial state.

The private collections at the TNA are testament to the fact that historical records that give the reader a sense of the everyday lives and world views of communities and individuals

need not be restricted to the private and public literary output of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nor does it always require the reading of colonial documents "against the grain" to retrieve the native voice subsumed by a dominant state.

An example is the diary of the Raja of Ramnad, a prominent Tamil zamindar from the late eighteenth century. The nature of the diary is unclear, given the fact that is has clearly been transcribed into English by a scribe, although it is replete with Tamil words. The account is however, a fascinating one – while it begins with somewhat formulaic ambitions for the main temple of the area, it then turns to the thoughts and ambitions of a local king in a colonial context. Thus the diary of Bhaskar Sethupathi, Raja of Ramnad recorded the following as his "ambitions in this life" in the year 1894 – "[for the temple] to complete the golden vimanam, the golden cupolas, the bell tower, the muntapam all around the sandalwood plank in moolasthana, the stone peeda, the silver coins for the peeda stone, the silver coins for the principal step, the silver coins for the panchalochana padi, sandalwood doors with bell metal hoops….gilt samhasna mandapa repair for Sree Raja Rajeswari". The diary then rather prosaically talks of the Raja's ambition to organize a grass plot for cows to graze. But the next few points in his list of ambitions are of more significance, and interest. Continuing with his list, the Raja mentions his desire, "To visit England during her majesty's reign. To visit America. To be a fellow of Madras University. To establish a Tamil Sangam. To get into some Legislative Council. To obtain a HCIE (?) at least and obtain the title of Maharaja To entertain royalty at Madura."[37]

It is interesting in this context to note that Bhaskar Sethupathy, the Raja of Ramnad has been a controversial figure in Tamil Nadu not least because of his involvement in the region's caste politics. The Raja, a leader of the Maravars was vehemently opposed to what he considered were the pretensions of the low caste Nadar community during the late nineteenth century. He was a hereditary trustee of the Minakshi Sundareswara Temple in Ramanathapuram district and filed a suit against a group of Nadars who in May 1897 sought entry to the temple. From time to time, he is frequently brought up in accounts by local historians as a figure that is worth studying. A G. P. Srinivasan writing in an online article entitled " The Disappearance of a Vital Historical Monument" written in May 2007 mentions with anguish that while "dilapidated

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[37] Diary of Bhaskar Sethupathy, Raja of Ramnad, 1894, Tamil Nadu Archives, Chennai.

colonial buildings" were being restored in Chennai and elsewhere, little attention was being paid to "Sankara Vilasam", the guest house in the palace of the Raja of Ramnad where Vivekanand stayed before leaving for the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in October 1892 (it was originally the Raja of Ramnad who was supposed to attend the event). [38]

The problem of the archival region:

Some of the most frenetic activity that continues to take place in the TNA [a process that was initiated by the re-organization of south India along linguistic lines in the 1950s and continues to the present] is the attempt, following an assumed political and linguistic logic to redistribute the holdings of the archive to Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Orissa, all part of the erstwhile Madras Presidency. Sections of, as well as entire collections that "belong" to other states are periodically shipped off to the state archive in question [these being the Malabar district records, most recently]. While the colonial government's centralization of records followed its own logic of governance, this recently initiated process has resulted in breaking the continuity of collections, not to mention resulting in the confusion of visiting scholars. Beyond a point, however, this kind of reallocation of the resources of the TNA is not possible, particularly for the Madras Presidency records that emanate from the period before 1857 where the records from different districts go into the same department volumes. The TNA is also home to records from erstwhile Ceylon and other South East Asian countries, in particular those pertaining to immigration. In these cases, of course there is no question of Sri Lanka or any other nation staking a claim to these collections.

Since there is no consistent policy of shared catalogues, and certainly no online ones, redistribution of this kind is extremely problematic for researchers, particularly for those who may not have the time or means to make multiple trips to different institutions. Indeed, the records themselves defy the logic of modern day political boundaries and are testament to the interconnected histories of these regions. The literary and court cultures of pre-colonial South India were polylingual to say the very least.[39] Colonial rule was to inherit this legacy: everyday

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[38] http://www.ivarta.com/columns/OL_070307.htm
[39] See for instance, Velucheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam ed, *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nayaka Period Tamil Nadu,* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992.

governance in its South Indian empire was predicated on forms of rule from different parts of the country; and it was dependent on a clerical, scribal bureaucracy that wrote in a variety of languages. In the early nineteenth century, for instance, Madras was far from being the Tamil city that it represents today – this was not merely reflected in the multi-lingual, even multi-racial character of the city, but in the nature of the administration and the records produced by the Madras government. [40] Other than Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam, the colonial office and scribal bureaucracy with its links to Maratha regime in Tanjavur, and the Mughal north used Persian and Modi extensively. Filled with petitions, memorials, correspondence and police proceedings, the records from the period are a visual patchwork of English interspersed with other scripts.[41]

Just as the administrative records of the colonial government in South India reflect the need to problematize the division of material based on some assumed notion of regional pertinence, private records speak eloquently of the connections and linkages between regions. Social and political documents, often in Modi, relating to the reign of the Maratha kings of Tanjore are one important example. Take for instance the collection of P. K Pingle of Tanjavur listed in the National Register of Private Records in 1973 and which consisted of the personal papers of the famous Pingle family whose founder was one of the "Ashtapradhans" or Council of Ministers under Shivaji. These documents mostly consisted of representations made by different poligars or local chieftans to the Maratha Rajas of Tanjore asking for the issue of fresh sanads for land, and reflecting the nature of the feudal relationship between the two.

Religious records belonging to maths, temples and churches are also testament to these connections and often contain the sort of information that would not be available elsewhere. An interesting collection is that of Suchindram located presently in the district of Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu but intimately connected to the Travancore Kingdom which in its heyday in the 18th century included much of Kerala and what is now known as southern Tamil Nadu. According to the National Register of Private Records dated 1973, the collections at Suchindram include

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[40] Whether Chennai is in fact culturally and socially a predominantly Tamil city even today is an arguable matter. However, it is clear that till the late nineteenth and early twentieth with the advent of Tamil nationalism, there was no politcal impetus or logic for it to be labelled as such.
[41] See Raman, "Colonial Kacceri"; Aparna Balachandran, "*Of Corporations and Caste Heads: Urban Rule in Company Madras*", Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History, Vol 9, 2008; Stuart Blackburn, *Print, Folklore and Nationalism in Colonial South India,* Delhi: Permanent Black, 2006.

records on palm leaf and Tamil, the most important of these being in the possession of the Sthanika of Vattapalli madam who was the hereditary trustee and the formal managing trustee of the temple and who directly regulated all the rites and ceremonies of the temple as well as being the custodian of the temple's property. The frequent correspondence carried out between the Travancore Palace, and the temple authorities is illustrative of the patronage bestowed on the temple by the state. Other than land records and accounts of jewelry and other property possessed by the temple, the collection contains crucial documents relating to the practice of *kaimukku* or *pratayam*, a penance performed to prove the innocence of someone accused of some guilt. According to this practice, the accused was to dip his hand into boiling ghee, and if his hand came out unhurt, his innocence was proved. Interestingly, enough this ordeal was restricted to Nambudiri Brahmins of Kerala and the fact that they were particularly partial to the Suchindram temple inspite of living far away from it, gave the *kaimukku* an added significance.

III The Internet and the Archive

This final section will consider the relationship between the internet and the regional state archive. For the present, the scenario is almost entirely a hypothetical one because although many state archives have on-going digitization schemes, there is almost no talk of access to their resources on the world wide web. One can think about the issue therefore in any form that seems useful – given our discussion about the archival region and collections in regional archives, let us turn our thoughts to what might be enabled through the online sharing of the catalogues of various regional archives, for instance those of the southern states in India.

In the previous section we discussed the on-going division of collections at the TNA according to the logic of present day political configurations on the one hand; and on the other, about private collections which remain unacknowledged but are startling in the ways in which they reveal the entangled nature of the social and cultural histories of regions that we today consider disperate. It is clear that resource sharing between institutions is essential. In an ideal situation, sharing of this kind would include that of collections themselves -- and in the scenario that is now under consideration, that of the catalogues to the collections in these institutions. These would not only include lists of the different kinds of material, but also the detailed indices

to the proceedings of different departments of government produced at different points of time by the colonial clerks, or even imaginative new ones that could perhaps reflect the ways the myriad ways in which the material has travelled. Catalogues such as these would of course be extremely useful to users who might be unable to travel extensively to access collections at different repositories and for whom the convenience of an online catalogue where the existence of a record can be ascertained and confirmed before embarking on what could be a long and expensive journey is immense. At the same time, however, it is important to keep in mind that there is, and can be no complete picture or complete story that the online catalogue can suddenly reveal. At the most – and even this is extremely important - the claim that can be made is that the presence of online shared catalogue might make the user aware of historical links and connections – social, cultural and political – that access to the archive from the increasingly narrow vantage point of the regional archive may not reveal. This is particularly important for the largest users of the archives – students from Tamil Nadu, the vast majority of whom for economic and logistical reasons, the TNA will be the only historical archive that they will consult. While one cannot forsee the kind of scholarship that this might generate, it is significant that access to polylingual nature of the Tamil past need not be understood as the preserve of medievalists, with knowledge of literature, and esoteric language skills; these are equally striking in the the records of colonial governance, both in their content and form.

We could argue that online digital catalogues also opens up the important possibility of writing about the archive in new ways, focussing not merely on its content, but on institutional history in different political contexts. If the forms, genres and repititons of the colonial archive reveal much about the nature of the colonial state, then the internet in making public, and participating in the recategorizaton and reclassification of the archive makes the preoccupations and emphasis of the postcolonial state particularly clear. It opens up the possibility of the archive being seen not as a mere repository but as an actor in production of historical scholarship by determining amongst other things, the movement and availability of sources according to logic which is certainly not that of scholarship.

As a institution, the TNA has little place in public consciousness, in fact its presence is best noted by its absence and from time to time, notices in the newspaper about conservation projects

or digitization schemes. Even as members of the city's English speaking middle class participate in walks and talks celebrating the colonial architecture of the city, the TNA, the chief repository of the documentary remains of the colonial state seems at a curious remove from it all. Given the bureaucratic hurdles the non scholar has to cross in order to access the state archive, an online catalogue is one way to create new kinds of users for the archive, and indeed to generate interest around it as a documentary evidence of the historical links between regions, cultures and languges which do not fit neatly into official categories dictated to us. This has a particular resonance in a city like Chennai, where twentieth century Tamil nationalism has resulted in the popular conception of the city as an overwhelmingly Tamil linguistic and cultural zone, eliding both its historical heritage but also resulting in the present day subsumption of other linguistic and cultural identities in the city.

IV *Archive And Memory*

A critique of the archive that has developed among citizens of former colonies, resists treating the archive as a symbol and repository of an authentic past from which the well springs of national feeling and culture can always be renewed. This kind of critique has also been applied to other loci from where we expect the recovery of authenticity, or a perfect tradition that will provide solutions to the present. Much recent writing discussed elsewhere in this essay seeks to understand the archive as a state mechanism that fixes memory and determines how we organize information, bodies, and how we shape identities. Those writing about former colonies point out that like their law, their army and police, the archive may differ in some aspects, but in others is a continuation of the imagination of the colonial state. In fact, to rescue the idea of the archive from being defined only as a state-generated perspective of culture, the past, cultural legacy, national tradition, or evidence of anti-colonial nationalism, the word archive is now circulated with other meanings.

Some of these meanings require us to imagine archiving as an ongoing activity, one that shapes the outlines of future communities, a process conducted by a variety of people, not just state or university appointed figures. It is possible for me to see Goa Chitra, a museum of agricultural

implements as an analogy for this. In a village called Benaulim in Goa, an annexe to an old ancestral house belonging to restorer and now curator, Victor Hugo Gomes', has been built to house his museum of agricultural implements. Gomes has trained in fine arts, but devoted recent years towards collecting objects and building a structure that would house objects from what he sees as Goa's vanishing agricultural heritage. Gomes' museum is unlike any other museum I have seen. For one, he has built it himself, room by room. A little away from the main gate to the museum are two covered sheds; a wet waste management unit and composting plant. The two units are active, converting cow dung probably and more, into compost that goes into an organic farm that lies just beyond the fence. This museum, as its creator intended, is a space that is continuous with the farm, the livestock and the recycling units.

There is of course, a difference between the farm and the museum interior. Where the farm and composting plant are in their usual context of use, the objects in the museum are clearly removed from their immediate contexts. Their presence inside a house, where they are objects on view, can be explained by seeing this as Victor's stance against change in Goa. His invitation letter to a preview of the museum criticizes the intrusion of modern technology, and the disappearance of a way of life.

While there is much that we recognise as conventionally old, valuable, and beautiful,

the familiar criteria for something that belongs in a museum, Victor's collection also brings other things into this category that makes us look at them anew. Ploughs, sieves, sugarcane crushers,

seed sowers and weights and measures of varying sizes, materials and kinds are arranged in an

order that is still not clear.

We are familiar enough with cooking pots and other objects that have a more active life in the worlds of rural communities appearing in our living rooms as objets d'art, and briefly one wonders whether this is an aestheticisation of rural life. But this museum tries to side-step this problem.

The presence of these objects, not yet fully out of use (or so it would seem) in Goa, begs the question of why it had to be museumised. While it is true, for instance, that cultivation has dropped drastically within Goa for a range of reasons one can scarcely say that fishing and cultivation do not continue. However, there are precious pieces of hand-crafted agricultural technology that are impressive here, and are not in use anymore.

A wooden sugarcane crusher bound with metal for instance, was 'rescued' by the curator and restored. The texture of wood and its areas of damage bear witness to labour that has vanished.

Gomes' act of collection seems to have captured a sense of time that is differentiated across the living farm and waste plant outside, and the objects within. This is a time that is not yet past, not yet safely objectified in other museums, but a world on the brink of dissolution. The collection has emerged, in his own words over the last decade by making speedy dashes whenever a phone call summoned him to acquire pieces of discarded furniture, candlestands, old embroidered vestments, and the rarer of his agricultural pieces. Aside from these, there have been long stays in forested areas, 'speaking to the village elders, capturing and documenting the ethnicity and rituals associated with every item'. But also, his collection has emerged from foraying into the attics, backyards and household dumps behind and within every home. It is from this past of disuse that Gomes has angrily summoned these implements to make them speak of a relationship to nature that is gone. The new time of his farm and waste plant, demonstrations of how things can still be, is a contrast to his ironic museumised repository of objects that are not yet of the past in Goa, just the stuff of storehouses.

Close enough to Margao, but decidedly not an urban location in Goa, this museum that traverses the fields of environmentalism, museology, art history, agricultural practice, and is an ongoing documentation in itself, refuses to be lined up with art academies, theatres, galleries and restaurants. Its steadfast existence in a village, housing what every village has lost, also offers hope for what these implements may one day be. It is Gomes' hope that they do not slide further down the scale of time, from attics and storehouses, into memory and other kinds of museums.

There is another museum in Goa called 'Ancestral Goa', visited often by tourists, which has lifesize fibreglass figures representing rural Goans frozen in tableaux which depict, also in fibreglass, the daily life of the village. The one time I was there, accompanied by two people who spent their childhood in Goa of the 1940s and '50s, the ludicrousness of the exhibit was striking. Why, when most of Goa still lives in villages, was it necessary to create these distinctly badly-executed figures that were also somehow offensive and caricaturing of everything that began outside the exhibit? When pressed to identify the difference between Ancestral Goa and his museum, Gomes emphasised that nothing in his museum was replicated or recreated, nothing needed to be explained anew, as though he were presenting an alien culture.

While Gomes' museum can be viewed as a response to the perceived splitting of aesthetics, function and technology in the modern world, for the specific purpose of this paper it also opens up an avenue by which to begin a discussion about technology, the archive and memory. This lengthy elaboration of the nature of the museum has in fact been undertaken because there is one form of modern technology – the internet - that the curator has begun to use for the dissemination of information, which poses no threat to the past. As a tool of dissemination and publicity, the internet and digital technology in general seem to enjoy a transparency and suspension from judgement that other technologies do not.

While this may be naivete associated with the encounter of any new technology, in the case of the internet, this is derived from a specific set of attributes. Unlike a paper-based archive, as has been noted in the vast amount of work on the internet, the digital archive dispenses with cataloguing systems that are arcane and alienating to all but the initiated.[i] It also dispenses with the spatial distance between user and archive, with entry regulations and barriers that ensure that few access documents of the past. As a result, the appearance of the digital document has a presence that renews the compelling sense of fragility and preciousness that we associate with the old document. Viewing this online, we still note colour, texture and design that help fix the period of the document, we marvel that we can now view this at the touch of a key, and it is still someplace else in its 'real' form, stored away from our touch. Walter Benjamin's The Work of the Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction has covered much ground in its analysis of how our perception of value and culture are altered with the introduction of mechanisation into image production. The internet further endows such reproductions with a renewed presence, another frame, a speedy dispensing of layers of distance, while still retaining a realm of authenticity – the authenticity of touch that is still possessed by the holder of the original document.

For those long denied the possibility of seeing and reading such texts, this is negligible deprivation. In fact, the escalating availability of data about the past, the removal of spatial distance between one text and another by the fact of their being online, has also helped erase a sense of temporal distance that separates them. As the internet apparently offers limitless possibilities for the contiguous appearance of discrete texts – where the conventional library seems to limit these – it seems to have broken conventional categories that divide texts

thematically and temporally. A technology that does this transforms the experience of those images and texts that are, above others, redolent with meanings and symbols of the past. Where Victor Gomes may approach the net for its potential to communicate to many Goans the value and preacariousness of their link with traditional technology, the internet has helped fuse discourses about the past into an undiffrentiated whole.

As is detailed in the section that follows, the domain of the past as an online phenomenon in Goa is now suffused with memories, memoirs, images, and an ongoing archiving of the present. The archiving of the present has often been viewed as a way of escaping the disciplinary strictures of history, a reclaiming of the right by everyone to be an everyday historian, so that archiving ceases to be a collection whose order and dimensions are fixed once done. In fact, the notion of temporal separation has vanished to such a degree that archiving constitutes the placement of texts or objects in a sequence whose logic is always open to the possibility of change.

This would presume however that the prior categories denoting history and tradition with which anyone approaches this activity dissolve in the face of the potential of the technology. In the case of Goa however, nostalgia is already a charged emotive centre through which always migrating Goans compensate for spatial distance and their temporal remove from life in Goa. The many memoirs and texts about tradition and the experience of migration have fused with contemporary discussions of life and politics in Goa. For online, the present provides an entry point for the departed and alienated to reenter the space of Goa. The same entry point that it provides for them to accumulate evidence of the past, to align personal memoirs and photographs with historical text in a manner that dissolves the distinction a non-specialist viewer-reader may see between memory and history. Nostalgia seems to have an absorptive capacity that thwarts the supposed plasticity of archiving online. Little wonder then, that the fiberglass figures of peasant couples tilling the land in the tableaux presented at Ancestral Goa, an installation mentioned at the beginning of this essay, fails the curator not only because it does not fulfill the expectations of realist art, but also because of its limited and defined denotative possibility. Neither satisfyingly enough authentic, nor differentiated or plastic enough to absorb meanings of the past that proliferate, it attempts to isolate and fix tradition with a rigidity usually associated with state exhibits. An exploration of whether internet technology and is reworked sense of the past also

reshapes the domain of land rights and the relationship to the state is the focus of a later section of this essay.

V *Land and memory*

Goa Chitra, a museum of agricultural implements in Goa, is not only a restorer/curator's defiance of the inevitable process of forgetting one's links to agriculture, it is also a response to a widespread feeling of malaise that there is something amiss in the way the relation of people to land has changed. It is possible to see the museum as a single stroke against the combined perception of loss/misuse/misappropriation/misguidedness relating to the land and its resources which its people could formerly take for granted. The fertility of the soil, the knowledge of water, the accumulated familiarity with plants, trees, festival and crop patterns are only some aspects of the many ways in which those who inhabit the land find their basic survival being wrested from them. A small part of this has to do with the voluntary sale of land in Goa – in as far as one can talk about the pressure of capital being a voluntary act. While anti-outsider sentiments are voiced by different groups for different reasons, the sale of land for profit is one impetus for alarm over the entry of outsiders into once intact villages. While the atrocities inflicted by mining activities and SEZ regulations form a more important part of this anxiety to preserve a passing landscape and culture, Gomes' museum does implicate Goans for their allowing the dissipation of land and its artefacts. His act of searching for, transporting, restoring and researching the life of each object in his museum is not only a gesture of preservation, but a stance against forgetting.

This is not without its complications. For the move for restoration of a way of life invariably leads to questions of ownership, possession, rights that are moral, ethical and legal. If the museum embodies an aesthetic and historicising response to crisis, there are other manifestations of disquiet. The Goan Gaunkary Movement with which the curator has sympathies, seeks to strengthen and assert what it sees as original forms of land ownership in Goa, the communidade or gaunkaria system, whereby land is communally administered by a hereditarily appointed group of male members representing groups of families from each neighbourhood of the

village.[42] The communidade is a functioning system today, is a legal, social and cultural entity, but has seen its economic role much diminished over time. Its economic and legal roles were most severely marginalized however with the handover of Goa to the Indian state and the introduction of the Panchayat system. Though those sympathetic to the movement would deny that this a facet of the movement, it is justifiable, I think, to anticipate that were the movement to grow, it would bring into conflict castes that are seen to be dominant within the communidades, and those left out, old migrants to villages and newer ones, those who have always owned property, and those who recently bought it, etc.

A strand within this overall argument tries to emphasize the principle of natural law, embedded in Portuguese law, on which it claims the communidade system is based – on co-management rather than ownership. For the notion of private property, according to this, is alien to natural law which sees God as the owner of land and human beings as its caretakers. This defense which emphasizes the responsibility and duties of cultivators and gaunkars hopes to bind all together within the notion of belonging to an original village and making agriculture a sustainable activity again, for in this lies the possibility of both a renewal of natural resources as well as a legal and political restitution of the state to a condition of self-sufficiency that the Gaunkary movement imagines is the past of Goa.

The detailing above of the questions around land are intended to make legible the ways in which these movements, agitations and litigation are held within a matrix of documents and moments of varying legality and weight; texts that impinge on each other's meaning and political significance within the ongoing movement.

This is predominantly an attempt to map these varying positions, their status within a world of legal battles and political movements. It also inquires into what would happen at each stage, were all the documents that determine belonging, possession and ownership, to make publicly accessible online. What kinds of publicity does the internet make possible in relation to documents and their communities? Lastly, it maps the virtual communities of Goans, most of

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[42] http://www.mail-archive.com/goanet@goacom.com/msg01132.html

them diasporic, who have of late been able to tap into the concerns of contemporary Goa in as far as they are represented on the net.

When I posed the question of how archives (whether digitized, online or not) could be relevant for a public beyond historians in contemporary Goa, there seemed to be no clear answer. As a frequent visitor to some of the significant historical collections of texts in Goa, it was apparent that the existence of the archives had no pressing relevance for contemporary politics, or daily life. No one, apart from writers, and a dwindling number of gentrified local readers may feel emotionally impacted were the already crumbling records to disappear.

This deflating realization brought to mind some writing that has emerged addressing this question a bit differently. These writings emphasise that the archives are ordered to enable the work of the state, and that though the writing of history relies on the content of archival records, it must also strain against the categories in which the past is presented. It must ask those questions that may be unanswerable by the archives, and pose those questions about aspects of life that the state never thought to comment on or preserve.

Another such strand of writing points out that for many societies, including our own, producing the past in the form of a historical document does not have the political, emotional or even legal impact that it may have elsewhere. Is there likely to be a surge of feeling among many people in Goa for instance, were the holdings of the Central Library and the Directorate of Archives to be sold piecemeal, say, to a foreign University? Is there a sense that Goan tradition is lodged in the unlikely receptacle of bureaucratic-looking government offices in Panjim? And which political movement actually requires that these records stay intact?

There is however, one large and unwieldy question that does bring state archives, secretariat records, legal documents, communidade maps and questions of tradition into conflict. The many disputes over the right to land in Goa does in fact bring people into the state archives in Panjim, into the Mamlatdar's office in Mapusa, and into contact with notaries to have Portuguese documents translated into English. Contemporary conflict over land in many parts of India, not just Goa, combines issues of land ownership, legal documents and digital technology in ways that makes it compelling to watch the kind of political and public space created by changing
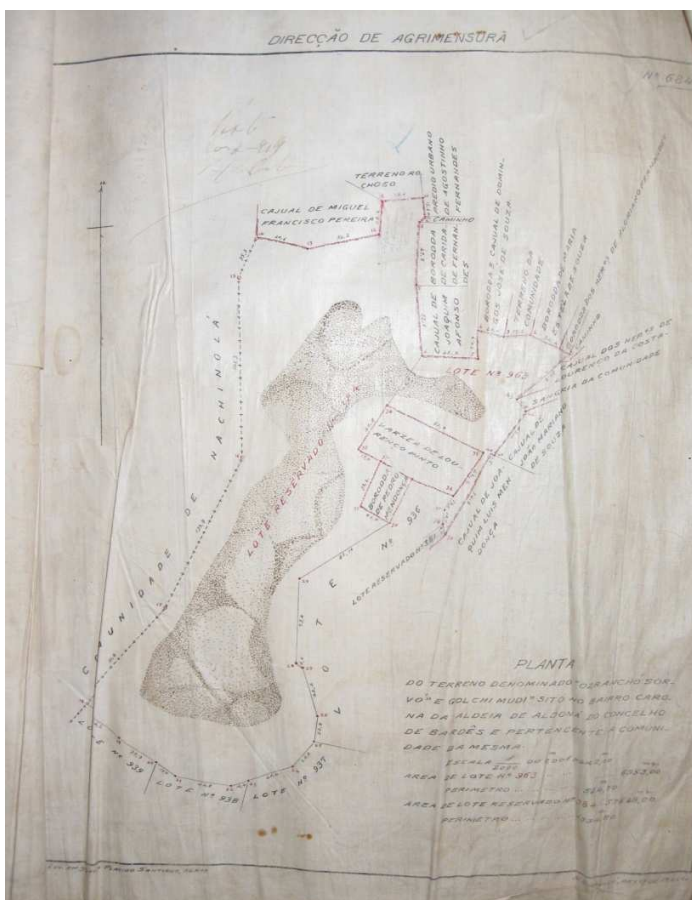
forms of circulation and dissemination. If we trace how effectively a document has worked as evidence of injustice or as a verifier of truth in the midst of political or legal battles over land, we are led to doubt the apparently inherent democratic promise of digital technology. While digital technology makes information cheaply available, it is sometimes irrelevant whether documents have a public presence in this form, because the battle over whether a piece of land is for agricultural or residential use, communidade land or private, for mining or for waterways, is decided elsewhere. The document digitized or otherwise, is the last of the signs that indicate that land use in Goa has changed. This implies that while there is a fulfillment of democracy in a technical sense with digital access to records, the political significance of a particular document and of the kind of public among which it circulates is decided by other processes of conflict. The availability of records through digital technology would ease the work of citizens trudging from one government office to another to extract papers, but the historical meaning of one kind of record, and its historical and political significance are decided by other means.

This study however examines two processes – i) how do the particular changes in public life brought about by internet technology also alter ii) the relation of a society to the archive? This question can be most aptly applied to one particular kind of land dispute – the concern around the rights, history and fate of the village communidade, seen as both a traditional Goan institution and a legal administrative entity, backed by documentation and maps that exist in local villages and the state archive.

Housed in the crumbling '*chaudi*' offices in each village, the communidade still runs on an almost honorary basis, a frugal economy, sustained by the political interest of active members. For the migrant Goan, visiting the communidade office when back in Goa is both a reassertion of rights or membership in village property, as well as an act of nostalgia. Yet we know that potentially massive monetary transactions and political corruption has created an underlying pressure that prompts current conversations about the communidade. The spiraling real estate in Goa has made land 'the new gold', as many of those whom I speak to reiterate. If the legal and economic structure of the communidade was indeed not based on the concept of private property,

as many of the arguments outlined below will suggest, that basic concept is now under greater pressure than ever before.

The communidade is an interesting point of focus because it challenges the divide between the traditional and modern that is so often made to distinguish state institutions from non-state ones. While it may well have acquired its current form under colonial rule in the sixteenth century, it is a widely held belief and could perhaps be the case, that the communidade is uniquely Goan as a form of village administration. The historical fact is immaterial here. One of the reasons why it is immaterial, is that even in its sixteenth century form, and even as an entirely colonial import, the communidade was a dominant legal practice of land administration that was *not* founded on the notion of private property. It is this aspect that is now invoked as traditional, original and pure of any interest in profit maximisation.

Yet, as I speak to some members of a village communidade who are involved in trying to strengthen the position of the communidade as the original *administrator* (as opposed to, but often implying, owner) of all village land, it is obvious that their task is not easily achieved. For in each village, even if we imagine a time without the scale of migration we see today, there were those who were original members of the communidade and those who were not. Revisiting the original form of the communidade now implies questioning the legal status of all those who have bought the land at any time in the past and who now assume the rights of private ownership which the communidade contests. Such a conflict involves the production and the questioning of the status of documents, records and historical facts for their meaning and their political weight, to argue

the legitimacy of one institution over another. It is this sort of dispute that most vividly makes visible the unstable nature of the document as historical evidence, as legal evidence, or as popular truth.

Any opponent of mining in Goa, or of beach front hotel resorts or merely of a usurping panchayat, at some point must deal with the legal categories and documents around land. In the case of disputes around land that is, or was held by village level communidades or gaunkarias, there is not even a stable or singular legal meaning attached to the range of documents that circulate among the competing authorities and parties. In fact, tracing the life and path of the different legal documents that are necessary to argue a case involving communidade land involves a tangle of authorities, repositories and disputing groups.

The overall thrust of the argument made here is that movements that are pitted against the state or the multinational entities it supports use various forms of political power. Dominant media representations would divide these into movements that participate in the formal exercise of power through law, regulation, and systematization, and the exercise of power through non-legal and non-state entities and means. The widely perceived illegitimacy of the state requires it to engage in two forms of political representation – the one consolidating its use of governmentality through law, the other effecting its sovereignty through a substantive exercise and demonstration of power. The appearance of legality and the lacing through of all political processes with due procedure and documents is important to sustain some measure of governmentality, while the domain of substantive politics requires that rule be maintained for instance, through overt coercion and expropriation. The two domains are not disconnected. For, the sheer existence of forms of governmentality implies that citizens are bound to demand the fulfillment of the liberal project that the state claims to be bound by. The Right to Information movement and the innumerable human rights reports and people's courts are instances of the state being called to order within its own terms. If these calls threaten to jeopardize interests beyond a certain threshold, then the state reacts violently, more often than not exceeding the bounds of legality. The success of the state lies in its ability to negotiate both these forms of power, allowing it to insert itself into dominant global currents in politics and economy, while keeping its house in order at home. This essay suggests that the unstable status of the document as the proof of truth

and evidence in legal and political conflicts is produced by the gap between forms of rule. In as far as both the state and its opponents use both legal and extra-legal mechanisms to exercise power, and adopt legally recognized and other identities to invoke diverse collectivities and powers, the document, whether digitized or not, does not have a stable function.

With the contours of a public sphere continuously in formation and dissolution, the notion of transparent governance as widely advertised by the state is in fact a reduction of the use of internet technology to its most basic function – that of being a tool of dissemination that does not alter the nature of power.

In the light of this argument, to be able to locate exactly how internet technology could potentially transform or merely combine with prevalent forms of communication, it is necessary to trace firstly, how different kinds of documents acquire both varying meanings and fluctuating legal weight within a situation of conflict. Questions of land in Goa or elsewhere however, also invariably bring into circulation different institutions that are linked by the thread of litigation that draws institutions and documents into a pattern that can sustain a claim, complaint or charge. The following elaboration of some disputes between institutions governing land in Goa are necessary to see why the archive plays a role in these disputes, and how the status of evidence, truth and proof is conferred on papers issued from different offices.

Panchayat and Communidade – two legalities

To return to the communidade office, the president of one of the two communidades in the village of Aldona stated, 'It's all about the 1 by 14 form'. The 1/14 form, whose legal significance this communidade has been fighting, is in fact a *lease* document, 'but is being used as a document of *ownership* in courts', according to the President. 'All of Aldona is communidade land' and 'the Panchayat', in as far as it claims to adjudicate on land issues, 'is illegal', he says. If I read the form, he claims, I would find that the land was leased, for example, to the church. The church however, is not the owner. Nor, he says, is the communidade the owner, for the communidade is not governed by the principle of private property.

It is not often, amidst the many kinds of legal disputes into which families and villages in Goa are locked, that one can find a negation of private property, but an explanation of this had best be left for later. The fraught relationship of the Panchayat to the communidade is interesting enough. The President insists that the Panchayat should properly be run from the communidade offices. To understand how these two entities are pitted against each other, is also to understand how two kinds of authorities, legalities and states have clashed, or rather, trodden over each other, particularly after the liberation of Goa in 1961. It is commonly understood that the Panchayat has the right and responsibility to take up questions affecting the welfare of the village, to collect revenue, to run elections, to file cases, to represent village interests. The President explains however, that while the Panchayat has the authority to take up issues, the communidade, as the 'original owners' of village land, have to be included in approving sales and projects and have to issue a No Objection certificate which is being disregarded these days. It is evident from this conversation that the communidade is now on the back foot in this debate. It is still however, a perfectly legal, recognised and functioning entity.

Portuguese, not British/Goan, not Indian

The diminished legality of the communidade is now being traced back to the point of Liberation, with the introduction of economic and legal structures that opponents have begun to term as British in opposition to the Portuguese. The communidade members assert that in the decades after liberation, the Panchayat used to hand over 1/6th of land revenues to the communidade, but that has now stopped.

While the supporters of the communidade try and explain to me the values attaching to legal terms used under the communidade system a different legal structure comes into view. 'If you see the document by which the church holds land in this village', they explain, 'you'll see that it has a lifetime or ninety-nine year lease. That means the church has usufruct of the land, but it cannot sell. The term, *Aforamento* means you cannot sell. You can have it for ninety nine years'.

The archives of Goa hold some significance for this particular opposition to the Panchayat, for the pre-Liberation records validate communidade claims. There is another set of records which sustains the reality of the communidade, and this is the maps that lie with each communidade

office. When asked if these are public documents, the members assert that while these are in a sense public, 'there is no reason why anyone but a gaunkar of Aldona should be able to see the gaunkar records'. What unfolds in the ensuing discussions with a range of people is that what we have in view today is an overlapping of two systems. The entry of Indian law into Goa after 1961 brought a hasty and scrambled blanket of what Goans see as 'British-Indian' laws thrown over a prevailing legal system that was not nullified or discredited. It simply generated a process of uncomfortable and hiccuping compromise, until current land politics have brought differences sharply into opposition.

In the light of the previous argument about the structure of politics and the state, one should emphasize that the gap between governmentality and substantive politics is not one that divides the state and people, but are conflicting templates in which politics plays itself out. One strand of land politics in Goa therefore pits the organisation of rights inherent in the idea of the communidade (now seen as a non-state legal structure) against those based on the exclusive principle of private ownership inaugurated as a formal practice of state by the British. Those who see themselves as disprivileged by the communidade system (often but not always, lower caste groups) however, would call on substantive politics and governmentality to wrest power within both communidade and panchayat, in combat with those aspects of governmentality within both structures that are seen to conceal and legitimise oppression.

In this context, it is interesting to view two recently completed PhD theses, those of Maya Dodd and Bhavani Raman, the one examining 'technologies of witness' oral testimony and the staging of democracy during and after the Emergency of 1975 in India, the latter examining the place of writing as a technology of power in colonial Tamil Nadu. Taken together, it would seem that the unfulfilled promise held out by the document of being witness, or a record, or proof of truth plagues politics. The sphere of the document and legality is however revisited over and over by those who believe they have a legitimate claim in the hope that it will do one of a range of things: occasionally deliver justice, usually infuse an ongoing political tussle with another kind of power, sometimes function as a further stage for the production of disprivileged identities, or delay the impact of extra-legal forms of oppression.

Maya Dodd traces the relay effect of representative politics, suggesting that the charge and the claim of effecting democracy circulates from one domain of testimonial production to another through different kinds of texts. She states, 'So while I am arguing for the fact that public interest litigation...served as heavily symbolic dialogue to making the state more responsive to subaltern issues, it is interesting to note that the subaltern classes seek and receive exemption from such judicial symbolism.'[43] This argument follows from her earlier pungent observation about the public struggles against the state for social justice after the emergency of 1975: 'there were no consequences to the production of truth'. This study examines the process of democratic dissent as if it were a technology, and observes that, 'It is interesting that seldom does the state's hearing of complaint produce action, but in the instance of airing the grievance there is a perception of democratic practice that I argue grants the state renewed legitimacy.'[44] Such a view of democratic practice incorporates both publicly circulated newsprint, the citizen's report and internet technology as so many technologies that are indistinguishable because they are contained by a politics that has a locus of power elsewhere. While Raman emphasises the process by which paper documents became the material fabric on which a regime of evidence, accusation and truth was sustained, Dodd's thesis seems to ask for a qualification of any optimism vested in subversive politics that rest on the same regime.

If we take into account protests around these land issues in Goa that use the internet, would this be anything more than an extension of the processes described in the two theses? Two modes of mobilization via the internet may be considered here. A PowerPoint presentation prepared by a group of professionals in Goa contested the government's initial Regional Plan, which intended to sell vast tracts of land to builders. This was circulated widely as the basis on which to mobilize (successfully) sufficient numbers to force the government to reckon with the opposition. In this case, not only was the regional plan temporarily abandoned, but the panchayats were activated and the Gram Sabhas are now often volatile meetings with members calling the Panchayats to account.

In contrast, the minutes of a recent meeting held by the Gram Sabha of the village of Moira is a vociferous declaration of a vision for the village to stay a village, and invokes the continued

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[43] p. 124
[44] p. 107

involvement of those who were at the meeting. The report on the internet does not seek to mobilize other entities to form part of a movement under the aegis of Moira, but instead reports on an already achieved victory, as an example for other Gram Sabhas to follow.

This cohesion achieved in the village of Moira was not via a public mobilized through the net, as is well know to those who were clued in to this corner of local politics in Goa. It was preceded by a series of meetings in at least one of which a member was roughed up by opposing members, allegedly arranged so that the business of the meeting could proceed without her interference. This was a political unity therefore constituted through substantive political mobilization, moving eventually into the domain of the state. The decline in the wider Goa Bachao Abhiyan, which had in fact initiated some of the processes that resulted in the Moira meeting, is also a sign of the fragility of mobilizations under the sign of a principle or identity of citizen.

While the formation and sustenance of the Goa Bachao Abhiyan rested on the summoning of identity around citizenship, it appears that an appeal on a scale wider than the village pointing to an unnamed political subject to undertake the 'real' political activity that will lend meaning to an explosive and revelatory survey, fact-finding report or article sometimes has no tangible recipient waiting to be activated. An essay such as this one is similarly positioned, thrust within some notion of a public, in the hope that it will act in itself, as witness, observer, and record. The production of documents, evidence and testimony, now in full public view on the net can be seen as an additional visible staging of the processes of democracy because the destabilizing or establishment of political power happens elsewhere. It is not that this realm of representation is unimportant, for it has to be accounted for, papered over and guarded. But its impact is neutralized by the other ways in which political subjects are constituted, which are not about addressing neutral citizens.

If nostalgia works as a channel for the blurring of boundaries between historical texts and personal memories published on the net, then political movements have the capacity to alter the legal significance of different kinds of documents. A member who acts as a go-between both factions of the Aldona communidade recalls that in 1995, the communidade undertook to

demolish what it saw as illegal structures constructed during the elections. This act spurred them onto forming an association under the guidance of a lawyer. For this member, the way to recover the space of the communidade legally is through emphasizing the rights of custom. In their desire to reinstate a legal system that has fallen out of circulation, proponents of the Goan Gaunkary Movement bridge the divide that is commonly drawn between non-codified custom or tradition and legality, as well a notion of continuous tradition broken only by the post-Liberation government. Restoring an earlier order however, requires reaching beyond legal appeals. If we analyze the arguments made in favour of the communidade, we would see that they also include ideas about the village economy, social hierarchy, and nature of technology and, always, the question of origins, of both communidades and their original members.

However, if the claims of the Goan Gaunkary Movement were able to develop into a movement to be contended with, they would find that the legal processes which they now brandish as historical proof of their dominium have and will be challenged for their authenticity and legitimacy. From the nineteenth century on, the 'original inhabitant' status of communidade members has been challenged. The presence of sudras and gauddos as a minority within communidades across Goa suggest that these may not have always been exclusively caste based organisations but have become the domain of a few castes.[45] From the nineteenth century, sudra and other caste groups have protested their exclusion or their restricted status as dividend holders of the communidade, to claim membership. These protests took the form of legal cases, with extra-legal claims to caste identity made during the process. Closer to the present, those who had migrated in search of jobs returned with sufficient money to switch from agricultural to other forms of labour, transforming their homes or building them afresh on what used to be agricultural land. Further into the present, there have been migrations from other parts of India. The current articulations of the Goan Gaunkary Movement stand to threaten all these interests with their focus on the rights of the original communidade members. The communidade records can prove these rights historically, but, as said before, the legitimacy of these particular records have already been challenged.

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From the point of view of those who were excluded from the communidade, or from the point of view of those who could potentially be threatened by a reassertion of the structure of the communidade (though this is far from the case), state technologies such as documents that prove rights to property etc. are what is at issue. This demarcation of the technologies of state is not an attempt to demarcate the space of those who are dispossessed or who necessarily have a legitimate claim. In fact, if we were to enter into the kinds of debates within each village, the divide between insider and outsider, legal and illegal occupants, can in no way be seen as a uniform division between dominant and dispossessed.

Returning to the question of the archive and technology

Documents are not far out of reach of the average communidade which still has one or two people with a passing acquaintance with Portuguese. To impress on me how central the communidade was to the administration of the village, one of the vocal supporters who was also recently on the communidade committee told me that that the salaries of the parish priests used to be paid by communidade until it all stopped in 1975. 'When I became president', he said, 'the temple (local village temple) committee approached us', claiming that they used to receive some maintenance money from the communidade. 'I went through records, found that this was the case, and I reinstated payment.' Going through the records, on closer inquiry, was an activity that could be extended back to the records of 1924.

With the practices of colonial record-keeping entering at least the early territories from the late sixteenth century, historical documents are both familiar objects as well as inaccessible ones. With communidade maps lying in the village offices, the handling of records is not a hallowed act, and original members can be endowed with legitimacy by accessing such documents. From the perspective of the overall movement however, which seeks to persuade contemporary Goans about the authenticity, antiquity and legitimacy of the communidade, archival documents of the sixteenth or seventeenth century may well hold more significance than the legal documents of the last hundred years. The communidade maps, apart from documents at the archives, stand testimony to public water bodies, fields, and pathways that are marked on the map, indicating individual and common rights over specific fields and groves. As we see an intra-village conversation develop around the question of what development the village wants or needs, one

can see the potential of these maps in being able to indicate common pathways, and commonly held ponds and fields, as opposed to those over which people had a right to cultivation. What is also evident however is that it is not the content or the historicity of these documents that is significant for this movement. It suffices that they exist, and can be invoked as potential evidence if ever it had to be produced.

If we were to look at the use of technology separated from the issue of access to archives, we would find that it has professionalized one current of activism. As each Gram Sabha circulates its minutes and reports on the internet, it can be said with certainty that among the main beneficiaries are migrant Goans, whether in Bombay, Dubai or Canada. For the others, news still passes by word of mouth, or through notices in the church, temple and bus stop. Yet, for a formation like the Goan Gaunkary Movement, or even for the current Gram Sabha in each village, this internet community may not be without significance. An original but now expatriate Aldonkar or Moirekar (from the village Moira) may no longer be able to participate in the Gram Sabha meeting, but given the frequent movements to and from Goa, and the extended familial contacts, the possibility of solidarity can bring benefits of expert opinion, information gathering, and monetary contributions for movements on the ground.

Frederick Noronha, online journalist and campaigner for open access and circulation of publications and information in Goa affirms the increased circulation of news via the internet has the expat community plugged into Goan politics and publications. 'The book in Goa has become a possibility' he claims, and is no longer the preserve of the elite. In a way, the immediate effects of internet technology are akin to those associated with print – it makes circulation of information economically viable, but one is uncertain of what other kinds of possibilities it enables. When the production of evidence and historical truth is in some ways beside the point when it comes to contemporary politics, the digitization of a repository plays a symbolic role – enacting the transparency of the state as it enables easier access to legal documents. If there is a significant kind of citizenship produced by this technology, it is the the nostalgic 'netizen' embodied in the expat Goan, who has extended her/his outpouring of memory and nostalgia from print to the net, and is now able to further recover individual histories of migration, contact,

expulsion, and further trace genealogies of historically momentous families and long-lost cousins. Noronha's point is that internet technology has in fact enabled the circulation of print in Goa which always suffered from small markets. It may well be easier to generate a reading public that extends beyond the elite with digital technology enabling cheap publishing, and the internet furnishing a reader for instance, for the low price publications by local authors that he seeks to promote.
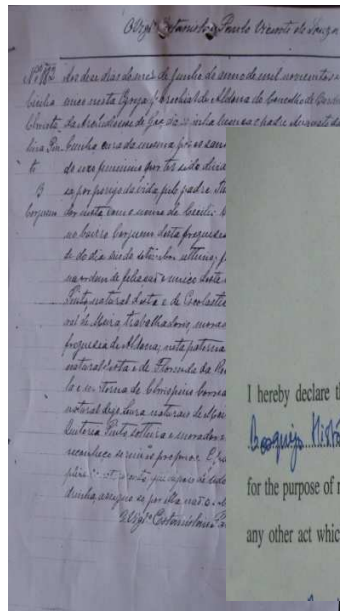
A right to documents

If the maps in the communidade office are now exclusive documents, what of institutions from which Goans have a right to demand documents? Blossom Medeira, the current archivist of the Directorate of Archaeology and Archives of Goa is refreshingly knowledgeable. When asked the pivotal question of this project – would the uploading of 'public' documents from the archives be an issue, she replies that in fact, since these are issued to the public anyway, it would not be. Centralised edicts urging all government departments to demonstrate the dual desirable aims of being transparent and technologically advanced has meant that almost all departments have plans for digitization that are partially implemented or are on the verge of implementation. While an infinite number of years may pass before documents are actually digitized, catalogued and circulated, each state institution will always, from now on, have plans towards it. These plans sometimes lack financial backing, trained personnel, or are simply caught in the usual bind of money not being released or utilized by the branches of government. Since technological transparency is now a state and not an oppositional claim, it is left to ascertain what kind of space is offered by the use of digital technology that is not already proffered by the state.
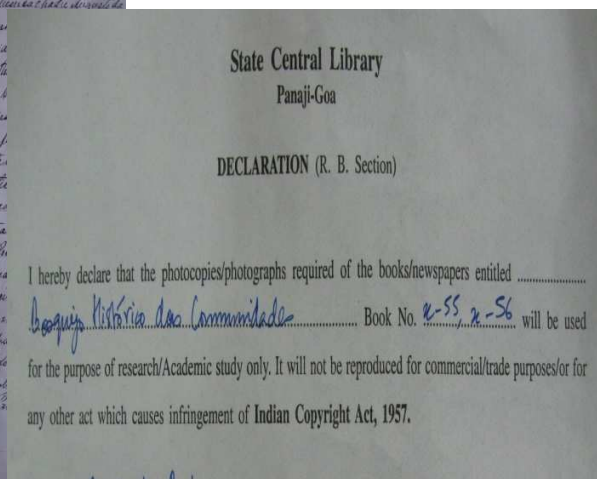
The Goa archives, as with State archives in other parts of the country, discussed elsewhere, deals with visitors through a dual approach. The archives are, on the one hand, seen as the repository of historical traces, with the state as guardian. As a researcher therefore, I need to furnish a letter, usually with institutional credentials, stating my interests and intentions. However, on an average, fifty users a day walk into the archives for a specific set of documents: birth, death and land records. These are citizens, in need of legal documents to supplement claims, plaints and disputes.

The position of the archivist general in Goa is an interesting one. Medeira not only displays an overall knowledge of the nature of documents required to lay a claim to land, but has an acute enough grasp of the mentalities involved in the constant search underway in the archive. She says for instance, that with the rise in the value of land, people are anxious in any case to have the value and legal titles to land ascertained. These documents will not, however, prove ownership. She too explains that the communidade is not based on ownership. It is in keeping with the argument about substantive politics made earlier however, that the meaning of a document is transformed absolutely by political will.

The notaries and translators unofficially accompanying those who can pay them are a repository in themselves of stories about the kinds of situations that require a dredging of records. Builders for instance must depute people to trace a clear land. record to acquire Litigious families trace claims to buttress their cases and those who intend to sell want a clear record in place. The presence of these numbers in the archives however, is also a result of the availability of documentation that potentially extends into the past, in part due to the presence of a colonial state from the sixteenth century on in some areas of Goa.

In fact, servicing the needs of researchers is only a fraction of the work of the archival staff and the archivist general who virtually stand in as quasi advisors and a para-legal advisory team to those who have no idea what kind of legal documents are required and who holds them. How would I begin a search for land documents if had the name of a village, a parent or a plot

number? The archivist says the search usually begins with the land survey department, which holds the new land survey and old survey numbers. This will then require a perusal of the cadestral record which has a detailed description of the plot, its features and limits. Those without a plot number must begin their search in the village or personal index for details that can then be used as a legal document. Alternatively, there may be an inventory of their ancestor's moveable and immoveable assets or documents signed by the former *escritores* or scribes in each village legalizing gift deeds, sales deeds and partition deeds in which the place of the plot and the year of the deed is mentioned. Some of these records are stored in the sub-registrar's office in Mapusa, which holds birth certificates, death and marriage records and surviving baptismal records upto 1913.

Having all these online would not necessarily help this process beyond a point, the archivist emphasizes, as the necessity of the records within the legal process and the fact that many of these records are in Portuguese would require further interpretation. The notaries of Goa emerge, in this context, as important figures who usually know Portuguese and, for a fee, play the role of legal interpreter at approximately Rs. 25 a folio, to ascertain the legal validity of a document, and as translator at approximately Rs. 300 a page. The translated document holds as a legal document.

There is therefore, a thin but well-maintained divide maintained by the archive between those documents that are handed out on a daily basis to litigants and those that are of historical significance. It would be hard to maintain this distinction, were a dispute to involve a village as a collectivity. If we consider the communidade of Aldona for instance, which split into two along caste lines in the early twentieth century, then one would see that the pamphlets and publications around the event would contribute significantly to any contemporary movement that was initiated today and that needed prior documents to bolster its claim. The pamphlets of the early twentieth century for instance constructed caste histories by drawing on legal evidence that

stretched back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, tracing communidade disputes over the veracity of signatures, the fallibility of rules, and the origin of communidade regulations. The same set of documents is now split into the historical and the legal domains of the archives, yet none would actually be closed off to a reader. As a historian one could pay for a microfilm of a historical record, and as a layperson, a digital print out of a land record.

When thrust into the role of bureaucracies by litigants, it is possible to see the archives, state library, and the registrar's office in a single continuous line, holding and dispensing legal documents with ease. Numerous people walk in to use the Central Library, Panjim, as a reading room, as they should, to extract photocopies of official announcements from government bulletins, to research school projects, etc. Researchers also frequent this library with holdings of immense historical significance. Yet, if the curator or other authorities are approached by a member of the public to ask if these collections can be made public, there is uncertainty about the authority, legitimacy and legality of releasing these from state control. This dual approach characterizes most state repositories. The same text could be issued as a legal document, but would cause the librarian to shrink with anxiety if asked to put it online. For those who imagine they are guardians of a national legacy, nothing is apparently as threatening as the glaring visibility of seeing a document on the internet, available easily to a reader. The kind of public produced through the internet is therefore not heterogenous. Moreover, visibility through the internet does not have the same value in all political contexts. In some cases, as with the nostalgia brigade, the internet forges a compact community across continents, and propels print, a technology that is ordinarily seen to precede it. In other situations, the internet is an appendage to an already formed notion of citizenship. For those guarding texts within small communities of old elites, the internet seems to allow in a blasphemously wide public that threatens the contained readership that a paper library still implies. In yet others, it stages citizenship, with the claim of extending its domain. For instance, the Goan Gaunkary Movement which has few supporters in Goa now has an online presence as well as publications in English and sometimes Konkani,

intended for popular circulation.[46] It claims allegiance to indigenous people's movements worldwide and carries an excerpt from the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It therefore stakes a claim to the position of victimhood by voicing claims of dispossession, historic injustice, and a right to territory and resources, even when these claims could be challenged.

NOSTALGIA

http://goanvillageassociationsoverseas.blogspot.com/2008/06/villages-of-goa.html

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/gulf-goans/message/18891

http://www.goa-world.com/goa/books/briefrev.htm

This elaboration of the legalities, political interpretations and tangled meanings of documents around just one land issue in Goa is intended to convey the gritty intricacies that remain to be resolved even as the internet plays host to a wave of nostalgia, remembrance, research on diaspora and the internationalized conversation that now takes place around village disputes and Goan culture.

In fact, while the most significant battles need to be fought at gram sabhas and panchayat meetings, the net provides a space for consolidation and exchange of opinion, and for a ceaseless move by migrant and non-migrant Goans to ascertain past roots, search for historical information and present their research that tracks, for instance, the circuitous movement of Goans through

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[46] **http://www.goancauses.com/gaunkars.htm**

http://www.goasu-raj.org/gen/articles/34.asp

http://www.goapluses.com/fullStory.asp?articleID=GOAP8ART727200762706

http://www.mail-archive.com/goanet@goacom.com/msg01132.html

British, Portuguese and other colonial territories to an online audience. How does this comfortably accommodate the singular anti-technological stance that unifies the more conservative definitions of culture as that which was originally Hindu, as well as those that oppose mining, and others, like Gomes' that sees alien technology as the harbinger of destruction?

A sometimes crippling nostalgia can grip migrant Goans who recreate in infinite detail the way of life and the contours of land left behind. Migrant Goans have sometimes been criticized in everyday conversation for their desire to have their village in Goa fixed in time so it is there to be revisited on each return to the state.

The anti-technological stance of the departed and the recent participants in environmental movements however does not begin to resolve the contradictions inherent in their stance. Likewise, the thrust of recent proceedings of the Gram Sabha in Moira for instance, seems anti-technological in its approach to development (we want to be a village, we do not want to be a suburb of Mapusa) but clearly claims a particular kind of technology in its imagination of what it wants to sustain in the village. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moira,_Goa

As such documents circulate in neighbouring villages, the question for online readers is whether they can come up with a similar plan for their villages. The question of technology is beginning to be posed in a volatile manner in different ways. For those at the receiving end of mining technology, the depradations of modern technology are only too visible. And in villages like Moira that have not yet borne the full impoverishing brunt of big hotels or mining, the question of what is good technology is an internal one and still has the appearance of a choice or a decision that the village can take. For Victor Hugo Gomes however, in as far as we can deduce from his statements and collection, there is certainty about what counts as good technology and what counts as bad. His particular standpoint privileges the hand as the necessary part of the human body that must be involved in the production and use of technology – anything that replicates its functions, and negates its involvement, for him signals the onset of bad technology.

For the Gaunkary movement, it is the entry of money as a neutral and removed currency of exchange that has led to the dissolution of the link to land, the dependence on agriculture, and an earlier social structure. It is also visible in the desires of the librarian of Goenkarancho Diaz, or that of the Thomas Stephens' Konkani Kendra. Both, along with Gomes, posit a notion of knowledge and culture that refuses a divide between agriculture and printed texts, between orality and writing. The library of the Thomas Stevens Konkani Kendra, whose original impetus is the language movement around Konkani in Goa, is surrounded by all the botanical varieties that the current director, Fr. Pratap has been able to lay his hands on. Likewise, the library, Goenkarancho Diaz, whose founder, Piedade Morais has been actively involved in the Konkani movement since the seventies, was originally begun as a supplement to the movement. Now, the vision outlined for it by Moraes embraces not only the books, but theatre, folk music and eventually, flora and fauna.

Thus Morais also rues the onset of new technologies: 'With the new generation the whole concept of library has undergone a sea change. In goa we had to have our own resources for entertainment. Now you press a button…' However he, along with other language activists and Victor Hugo Gomes are open to digital technology and the transmission of their material through the internet. The internet is therefore not viewed as the endpoint in the trajectory of destructive technology, a button that can be pushed to elicit entertainment, but has been quickly transferred to the position of a transparent receptacle, preserver and disseminator of culture, where the state library is seen as a destroyer of texts.

VI *In the Capital*

As we stood a whole forty-five minutes in line at the gates of the National Archives in Delhi until we filled in a form that clarified our identity, we noticed that the novelist Amitav Ghosh swanned in without too much of a wait. Understandably, the next painstakingly researched novel should not be kept wilting in the sun. The fact is however,

IESVS MARIA
ARTE DA
LINGOA CANA
RIM
COMPOSTA PELO PADRE
Thomaz esteuaõ da Companhia d.
IESVS &c. acrecentada pello Padre
Diogo Ribeiro da mesma Cõpanhia
E nouemente reuista,&cemendada por
outros quatro Padres da mesma Com
panhia
IHS
Com Licenca da S. Inquisicam & Or
dinario
em Rachol no Collegio de S. Ignacio
da Companhia de IESV. Anno de
1640.

1

that many potential researchers who approach state archives do so with a little apprehension about possible obstacles in the way of actually getting in, and one has to provide documentation proving affiliation to a University, etc. The focus of our interest in this visit to the National Archives was to find out what rules formally governed the average citizen's interaction with archives, and how open they were to involvement from historians and other researchers. The anxiety that one perceives initially on speaking to staff about general access and (as a separate issue) about the fragility of documents contrasts with the view of many of the archivists, who assert that the archives are technically open to all citizens, and are a public repository. This legal fact is expectedly mediated by other legal qualifications about political sensitivity and interests of the nation, and subject to a relay of permissions solicited from various authorities. A search for a conspiracy of concealment however, would draw a blank in most state archives. What works is a sort of relay of apprehensiveness and bureaucratic lag, with many staff anxious about handing over what we would see as an innocuous list of publications available in their bookshop, to a list of documents acquired from the British Library through entirely official exchange agreements. Save those who are higher up in the hierarchy and more secure in their positions, acquiring information could necessitate an RTI application just to surmount the anxiety generated by our informal questioning.

This anxiety is better understood when we learn that the [National Archives of India](#) (NAI), one of the largest repositories of colonial and post-independence records, is overseen by the Ministry of Culture, but also, by default, by the Home Ministry. As the official repository of 'non-current records', the NAI is the recipient of de-classified documents and receives directives from time to time from the Home Ministry regarding restrictions to be placed on public viewing of documents. This fact generates an over-hanging awareness of potential reprimands and memos that could issue from these Ministries, asking for explanations for why certain documents were released. A direct result of this is the pro-active censorship of materials such as maps of disputed territories or documents that 'may incite communal disharmony' by the archival staff themselves. One member of the staff, for instance, disallowed the reproduction of a map of the Tibetan region on the grounds that it would 'jeopardize the geo-political interests of the country', and recounts how he was responsible for withholding certain documents that were demanded by

motivated political parties during the Emergency as their release would have impacted the office of the leader of the opposition at the time, Charan Singh.

The NAI thus sees itself as closely wedded to the state and as a responsible guardian of potentially impactful documents that would have dire consequences in the wrong hands. No other state archive quite sees itself as the official concealer of the state's dirty linen, and the Delhi archive, in that sense, is the apex institution in the degree to which it alone manifests emotions displayed to a lesser degree by state archives across the country: secrecy, responsibility, control, paternalism, and righteousness as the arbiter of access.

Archivists themselves are aware of this. They point to the fact that the maximum difficulty is encountered at the gate; where it can take a full half-hour or more to get past the security, get a daily pass issued, etc. Senior members of at least two prestigious archives in the capital pointed to the security guard's authority at the gate as being the biggest hurdle to accessing the archives. Some point to the 'caution exercised by the hatchet' at the Ministry level, even before documents arrive in the public domain.

Pramod Mehra, the Assistant Director of the Archives who has also researched the archives as an area of interest, indicates that little has changed since 1923 in the form of record-keeping, a consciousness he says, brought in by the colonial government. The strife over public access can be recounted from the time of the colonial government with differing views exercised by changing governor-generals. The archives, he states, function as a mediator between the creating agency such as the Ministries, and scholars. But, he insists, all who carry bona fide documents proving their identity as citizens have an inalienable right to enter the archives.

Technically therefore, there seem to be sufficient spaces for intervention by users, and in fact, the increase in the number and kind of users has in itself forced an expansion in the categories of users permitted. It would appear that this is the trend in other state institutions too. Our earnest 'conscious-citizen' stance seems a bit mis-directed. Where archival records accidentally have non-historical functions, as in the state-specific Delhi Archives, to be discussed later, the archive alters eventually to accommodate users and it would seem that generating such users and uses is the easier way to address the question of access.

The other mechanism is to find hooks within the system through which to enable access. Take the case of the Central Secretariat Library which is housed within the Secretariat complex in New Delhi. The Library sees itself as a repository, but not as a historical, moral or political guardian of government records and documents, open to government employees by right, for any research they may want to conduct; in contrast to the *archive*, and regardless of content, this is only a *library*. As it transited from the colonial period, this library stored official documents that pertain to the past of the current state. Since the library views itself as open to the public for general reading, there is not much anxiety over making older books and documents available. A student working on the North East, for instance, will find it cumbersome to enter the National Archives and to access maps of the region which may be far more easily traced in the Central Secretariat Library.

What is of even greater interest is that this is the library that holds any document (acquired through government exchange programmes, for example) by a foreign entity from any archive or library in India, in formal collaboration with a state institution. So, for instance, the online Digital South Asia Library (a consortium that is fronted on the University of Chicago website), collected a range of literary works in Indian languages based on the compilations of a national librarian. A copy of this collection lies with the Central Secretariat, as do microfilms that have been received as part of an exchange programme with the British Library. The current director of this Library appears only too willing to encourage collaborations from historians towards the cataloguing of these collections, which once again are closed to the public merely because adequate cataloguing procedures are not in place. In an interview that appeared to open doors, he insisted that generating public pressure around the significance of the collection would work as a persuasive force, as evidence that the funds allocated for digitisation or preservation are in fact needed, and that an audience exists for such material.

It seems as though appealing to abstract principles of access, citizenship and rights calls forth nameless and immovable blocking mechanisms inbuilt in the state, whereas tinkering with minor functions that do not invoke its broader *raison d'être* allows one to enter unnoticed. Aparna Balachandran's account of the Delhi's other state archive develops this argument.

Less visible than the National Archives of India is Delhi's other state archive, the Delhi Archives. Unlike the NAI, which is located in Janpath at the heart of Lutyen's Delhi, the Delhi Archives share a dilapidated building with the Delhi Institute of Heritage Research and Management, in a corner of the Qutub Institutional Area. The Delhi Archives were set up in 1972 to house documents and other material pertaining to the city of Delhi from as early as 1785, consisting mainly of the records of the Delhi Resident, and post 1857, the Commissioners' Office. The collection is certainly not vast, but includes gems like the Mutiny Papers, the 600 page document on the trial of Bahadur Shah Zafar, papers on the post-rebellion demolition of Chandi Chowk and records on the setting up of Imperial Delhi.[ii]

In 2006, the Delhi archives launched an ambitious and much heralded project to digitise its entire collection; the process was still underway in early 2009. Documents, maps and photographs are being scanned and the visitor can access these on the two or three computers that are available for the purpose. Unfortunately, the computers are equipped with a search engine that is both difficult and cumbersome to use as well as being excruciatingly slow. This technology was developed by and borrowed from the NAI, where the online index is so ridden with misleading spellings as to make it practically unusable. Our brief use of the search engine at the Delhi Archives did not seem to throw up any glaring mistakes here at least – or perhaps we were dazzled by the visual materials now available online. Maps, the earliest going back to 1803; photographs including those of nationalist leaders; landscapes, cityscapes and monuments shot by colonial photographers; and photos of the archive staff posing in the library stacks and offices are now all there to view with a mere click of the mouse. For a hundred rupees apiece moreover, the user can go home with the images of her choice on a pen-drive or a CD.

It is notable that the users the Delhi State Archives and the NAI get are extremely different, a fact that impacts the way the two places function, particularly in terms of access. We were told at the research room at the NAI that the variety of users it gets has increased both in numbers and in diversity, so much so that a few years ago, archive officials decided that the category of "bonafide" user had to be expanded to include the non-academic user. While the bulk of users are still most certainly academics, the archive, or the idea of the archive, looms large in the public imagination. There are for instance, many novelists and film-makers who use the NAI.

Not all are happy with their experience; some leave disappointed because the dry colonial records do not reveal, or immediately reveal the stories and detail they seek. The launching of state schemes - like the extension of martyrs pensions - that require written evidence from the archive also triggers off an increase in users who need to find traces of family members. As more people and events are defined as part of, and co-opted into the National Movement, claimants to familial connections soar. We were told that there was an influx of enquirers from certain villages in Haryana after a few families were able to substantiate their claims of being descendents of INA soldiers. Last year, the government agreed to grant the status of freedom fighters to the victims of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919 resulting in the arrival of those claiming to be descendents seeking evidence for the same (a complicated situation because of the vast discrepancies between the reported numbers of those killed in the British and Indian lists).

Interestingly, one case had a direct impact on the archival policy on access to documents. In the 1990s, with the increase in the number of heritage hotels in areas that included the former Princely States, claimants to land soared, with the NAI and the Home Ministry being dragged to court in several cases. As a result, the Accession Papers of the Princely States were made unviewable (a mystery was thereby solved when I repeated this information to a historian friend, frustrated that she was not allowed access to Dewas records from the '50s for some unknown reason). Interestingly, the largest category of new users consist of descendents of indentured labourers who left India in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to places like Mauritius, Jamaica, British Guiana, Trinidad and Fiji who want to trace their family histories. This is no easy task – these migrants appear in the lists that the colonial state kept of passages, medical examinations, births, deaths and marriages but were referred to by their first names only.
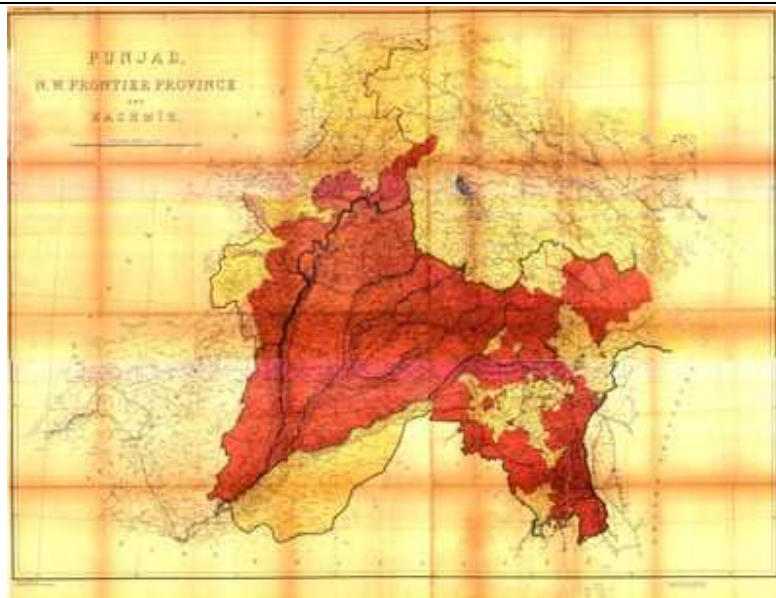
The profile of users at the Delhi Archives is quite different; most are non-academic and the number of scholars there could be as small as one or two a month. The non-academic user is also of a particular kind. Employees from various Delhi government departments are occasionally dispatched to the archive to refer to old files. But more importantly, the Delhi Archives are home to Delhi's municipal land records. A fifty to a hundred people a day arrive to look at, and make photo-copies of land records in order to settle disputes, make claims etc. The process is simple and routine and perhaps it is the fact of its being an everyday legal office that makes the Delhi Archives far simpler to access than a scholarly archive like the NAI. Materials like border maps that are deemed as posing a threat to national security cannot be accessed at the NAI. Browsing through the maps at the Delhi Archives, we came across several border maps, a few of which we bought copies of that we can now presumably reproduce, disseminate or enlarge to hang on a wall.

THE
BALUCHISTAN AGENCY
WITH
SIND
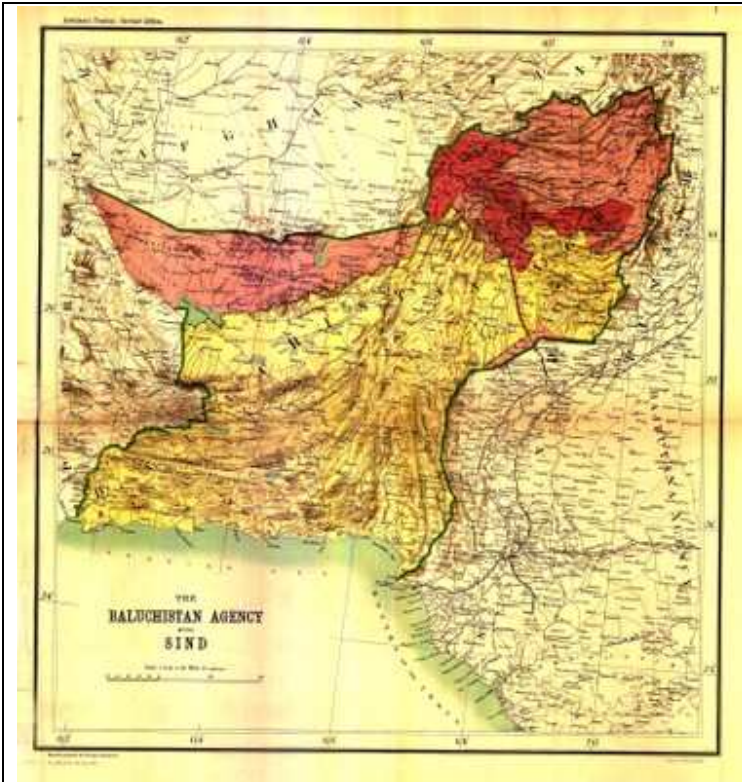
We asked Sanjay Garg whether there was a policy at the Delhi State archives to disallow the viewing of any of its records. Yes, he said, if the material was a threat to the nation's safety. Had such a restriction ever been imposed? No, he answered.

Aparna Balachandran

In an unpublished dissertation, Bhavani Raman traces how the colonial state in Tamil Nadu endowed paper transactions with multiple values of authority, evidence, law and veracity. In the process, oral transactions were negated as a trustworthy form for legal and political transactions. Documents, she claims, 'not only became pre-eminent artifacts of knowledge, but acquired a punitive power. This situation is akin, she says to what David Dery calls 'papereality', where documents become 'real' in as far as they have to be taken into account by everyone, and are the binding intermediaries to the relationship between state and citizen. This 'document raj' as she

characterizes the rule of the colonial document, became the overdetermined sign of the reach of the colonial state.

The National Archive as a sign of the postcolonial state's existence carries all of these burdens. The fact that the state continues to deposit traces of its deliberations with the archive, makes the archive a potentially explosive repository of recent political history. The same archive is also a sign of colonial rule and its departure, a sign of the partition of what would have been a larger state into two, a repository also of documents that carry antiquarian value and are therefore the sign of the state's lineage. For this reason, the same map lying in the National Archive is overlaid with these meanings, and divested of them when in a public library. Any call on the national archive to reveal its documents in the name of democracy only presses on these highly charged points and releases the genie that overlooks national security and heritage.

In sharp contrast to this apparently fraught relationship to documents that are deemed particularly sensitive, is the universal state mandate for transparency through the use of digitization of government documents. The state would appear to be the most fervent believer in the promise of digital technology, as though the sheer appearance of data on a screen would free it of its own inability to wrest that valuable democratic entity, information, from its entrails and free it into uncontrolled public space. This belief mirrors the tendency to see the introduction of all new technology as the furthest point in a history of progress. It scarcely needs to be elaborated that controls can be extended to the digital domain. The attempt here however is to emphasize the relationship to technology that is not channeled through the state's express intent, but as a default function of state, to generate some mechanisms intended to enhance democratic participation while generating, in the same mode, mechanisms to protect itself against citizen scrutiny or participation.

The visual nature of the internet as opposed to the document however, contributes to the feeling of its intrinsic publicness. All restrictions remaining the same, the sheer availability of the document online promises to eliminate the series of interactions and obstacles involved in entering the archive, extracting, circulating, collecting and replacing documents on their shelf. The ongoing digitization of the catalogue of the National Archive itself which already has

numerous errors is a sign however that this task is a gargantuan long-winded one, involving considerable language skills. Past efforts to include lay historians in decision-making have resulted in the physical exercise of inclusion, without any alteration in the actual decision-making or agenda of the archive. (append Shahid Amin's documents) Likewise, the task of publicizing all of the state's collections may well be mired in the real limitations of the functioning of any large state bureaucracy.

Does one then see internet technology as a continuation of state mechanisms of shaping and contouring citizenship? Such a view would disallow for the potential of this technology in itself to generate its own uses, and for the unpredictability of users. To follow those who theorize the relationship between technology and society by avoiding the division between human agent and destructive or liberating technology, it would be more useful to sidestep perspectives that position technology as a neutral mediator between state and citizen, or as an external vehicle of advancement, and look instead to the zones where intent of state or plea of the citizen is absent.

Such zones present themselves at the points where the state is at its most 'bureaucratic' and therefore most devoid or threatened by intent. Such points are the Delhi State Archives, which sees itself as fulfilling a mundane bureaucratic task, or those collections within the National Archive that can be construed and will be viewed to be so, or the Delhi Secretariat, which does not greatly distinguish between a government report generated in 2009 and one issued in 1860, seeing both as documents of the government. It is at these points, where the passage of documents is viewed as between holder and any eventual user, not a rights bearing citizen, that the fluidity of technology is most likely to be visible. Both government agency and their visitors are here cast as already inserted into a legal or other system that has accounted for the transaction, and neither side views itself as an agent.

In fact, to address the potential of digital technology outside of the vision of a democratizing agent, theorists have focused on the nature of the catalogue and the degree of user intervention as the zones where attention needs to be paid.(Ashish Rajadhyaksha)

For those conscious of the pedagogic and political potential of state holdings this may seem to ignore the most vital of the historical/cultural/political collections. Yet, this aims to suggest that

outside of technocratic visions (that will take decades to achieve), of both the state and large funding agencies in the form of universities or corporate houses, inserting oneself into non-agential spaces may be the most useful point from which to examine the nature of internet technology in its relation with the state archive.

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[i] Archives of the contemporary, such as those housed by SARAI in Delhi or the recently launched Pad.ma (Public Access Digital Media Archive), an open access video archive that allows users to catalogue, edit, comment and add their own data pose some challenging questions to a conventional approach to the archives.

[ii] Like the NAI, the Delhi archives are presently suffering from a lack of both funds and staff; the library, for instance, is in a state of complete disrepair. But we were assured by Sanjay Garg, who is in charge of the research room that the archive itself is in good functioning order. The process of cataloguing its scattered Persian and Urdu records is underway, as are efforts to digitise the entire collection, about which I shall presently say more. From the very beginning, one of the important mandates for the setting up of the Delhi Archives was the acquisition of material "of interest" to Delhi (although the grounds for adjudgement seem fairly unclear) from other archival collections. We were told that records are regularly acquired from the Haryana and Punjab State Archives, and from the NAI; in addition, when funds allow, a historian is dispatched to the British Library to decide on what should be acquired from there. The Acquisitions Department also sends out a call in the papers at intervals for information about personal and family collections; sadly, we could not glean more information about this process because the person in charge was away on vacation.