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## *Report from the Field*

# Seeing Yourself in History: Community Archives and the Fight Against Symbolic Annihilation

MICHELLE CASWELL

**Abstract:** Building on the author's experiences as the co-founder and a board member of the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), this article posits that independent, community-based archives are crucial tools for fighting the symbolic annihilation of historically marginalized groups.

**Key words:** archives, community, participation, symbolic annihilation

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE OMITTED from history textbooks? What are the implications of not being able to find any (or very few) traces of the past left by people who look like you, share your cultural background, or speak the same native tongue? What impact do these archival absences have on how you might understand your place in society? These questions were central to Samip Mallick and I when we founded the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA) (<http://www.saadigitalarchive.org>) in 2008 and they still continue to guide our work.

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Mallick, the son of immigrants from India and now SAADA's Executive Director, grew up in Michigan without any knowledge of South Asian American history. "We did not learn about people who looked like me in US history class," he says, causing him to question his place in American culture and feel like an eternal foreigner. "From a young age I felt unsettled in my identity as an American." SAADA aims to counter this kind of alienation by documenting the long history of South Asians in the United States through a freely accessible digital archive.

When we founded SAADA, Mallick and I were both working at the University of Chicago, he as the South Asia Outreach Coordinator and I as the Assistant Bibliographer for Southern Asia. We began investigating the history of the South Asian American community. What we discovered astounded us. Beyond the highly educated post-1965 immigrants of Mallick's parents' generation, was a rich, century-old history of South Asians in the United States. There was the story of Anandibai Joshee, who arrived in Philadelphia in 1883 to become the first Indian woman to earn her MD in the United States. There was the story of the Gadar Party, an international anticolonial organization that brought together migrant farm laborers and students in California to agitate against the Raj in India in the 1910s. There was the story of Dalip Singh Saund, who in 1956 became the first Asian American elected to US Congress. And more recently, there was the story of Lalit Gadhia, who immigrated to the United States in 1961 and helped form "The Goon Squad," a Baltimore-based group of civil rights activists.

Despite the historical significance of these little-known stories, only a few museums ever had organized exhibitions on South Asian Americans and no archival repository was systematically collecting materials related to South Asian American history. None even had South Asian American history as a collecting priority. Searching through archives, Mallick did not see himself or his community reflected. It was as if South Asian Americans had been symbolically annihilated. Symbolic annihilation, a concept first developed by feminist media scholars in the 1970s, describes what happens to members of marginalized groups when they are absent, grossly under-represented, maligned, or trivialized by mainstream television programming, news outlets, and magazine coverage.<sup>1</sup> Applying this concept to the archival realm, Mallick and I found that American repositories were ignoring or overlooking materials that document South Asian American history, treating the community simply as if did not exist, despite the fact that there are currently almost 3.5 million South Asians in the United States and that one in every one hundred Americans can trace their lineage back to South Asia. For us, the archival absence was astounding.

Something had to be done and done quickly; with many of the South Asians who came after American immigration policy opened up in 1965 aging,

1. Gaye Tuchman, "Introduction: The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media," in *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media*, eds. Gaye Tuchman, Arlene Kaplan Daniels, and James Benet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 3-38.

and many of the early community websites from the 1990s disappearing, much of this history would be lost without an immediate archival intervention. Ever resourceful, Mallick hatched a plan. Rather than partner with a mainstream repository where South Asian American materials might be undervalued, get delayed in a backlog, or misinterpreted, we formed an independent nonprofit organization whose mission would be to document and preserve the long history of South Asians in the United States. We each pitched in \$100, bought some server space, started to make connections, and began the process of incorporating as a nonprofit organization.

Six years later, SAADA holds the world's largest collection of digitized materials related to South Asian American history. We collect materials that are not just celebratory in nature, but reflect the diverse range of South Asian American experiences, from pamphlets advertising the talks of Indian religious gurus in the 1910s to websites created by Indian American politicians in the 2012 election. Documenting the stories that initially inspired Mallick, SAADA now has digitized copies of an 1883 letter from Anandibai Joshee requesting admission to the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania, a 1917 clipping from the San Francisco *Examiner* entitled "Hindustan Revolution Right Here," detailing the mission of the Gadar Party, and a photograph from the early 1960s of Congressman Saund meeting with John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. Together with community members, we are working hard to continue to uncover little-known stories like these.

As a community-based archive, SAADA is not affiliated with a larger academic or institutional repository. Rather, SAADA is governed by an independent board of directors made up of Mallick, two scholars of South Asian American history (Manan Desai and Pawan Dhingra), a nonprofit fundraising professional (Rabia Syed), a lawyer (Neil Maskeri) and myself (now an assistant professor of archival studies and the only board member who is not of South Asian descent). Sitting board members nominate potential board members based on the fit between their skill sets and organizational needs; new board members are then accepted to the board via consensus. Although we aim for the board's composition to reflect the socio-economic, generational, gender, national, and religious diversity of the community, the board is currently disproportionately second generation, academic, and of Indian descent; this may soon change as we are in the midst of a board recruitment phase.

We also work with a diverse group of dedicated volunteers nationwide who help us track down, digitize, and describe materials, publicize our collections and events, and research and write about items in the collection for our blog *Tides*. Many of our volunteers are students; undergraduate Asian American history classes have recorded oral histories for us, summer interns have researched grant funding for us, and students in masters of library and information studies programs have helped us figure out who our users are and how to drive more traffic to the site. Dozens of volunteers—both students and South Asian American community members—have performed the unglamorous task of scanning each and every item in our collection. Once scanned,

the materials are described at the item-level by volunteers and board members and categorized by theme and subject, allowing users to connect them to related items from other materials in SAADA's collections.

SAADA board members oversee digitization projects and make careful appraisal decisions about which records to include and which to exclude. Given the amount of time required to digitize and describe records in the collection, these decisions are made on an item-level basis as the materials are being scanned so that every single digital file in the collection has been deemed to fall within the scope of SAADA's collection development policy. The policy clearly defines the scope and format of materials to be included, as well as delineates a broad definition of South Asian American:

SAADA collects digital files of materials in all formats that relate to the diverse history of South Asians in the United States, including written documents, newspapers, photographs, audio and video recordings, oral histories, pamphlets, websites, and digital files. We broadly define South Asian American to include all those who trace their heritage to Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the many South Asian diaspora communities across the globe.<sup>2</sup>

We have strategically located our collections under the wide rubric of "South Asian American" rather than orient ourselves to a specific national, ethnic, linguistic, religious, or regional identity. In this way, we aim to build connections among diverse groups, while at the same time documenting their differences in a way that recognizes the constructed history of South Asian American as a category.<sup>3</sup> SAADA's employment of the sweeping regional term "South Asian" also reveals that second generation South Asian Americans comprise our targeted user group and the majority of our board; although immigrants are more likely to identify by their countries of origin, their children often emphasize regional commonalities.<sup>4</sup>

Our collection policy names several key collecting priorities: pre-1965 immigrants and visitors; the anti-South Asian Bellingham Riots; South Asian American political involvement and activism; professional associations and labor organizations; regional and community organizations; religious organizations and places of worship; community newspapers; student organizations; and prominent South Asian American artists, filmmakers, writers, musicians and intellectuals. These priorities were determined collectively by board members with input gleaned from community members at public events. In 2014, we launched a special initiative to document South Asian American elected officials and are experimenting with attempts to link collection

2. South Asian American Digital Archive, "Contribute," <http://www.saadigitalarchive.org/contribute>.

3. Michelle Caswell, "Inventing New Archival Imaginaries: Theoretical Foundations for Identity-Based Community Archives," in *Identity Palimpsests: Ethnic Archiving in the U.S. and Canada* (Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books, 2014).

4. Ibid.

development with fundraising so that specific collections can be sponsored by individuals and organizations, contributing to our operating budget.

We actively pursue collections through our contacts in the community, approaching key organizations and individuals to ask for copies of their records. We meticulously follow footnotes in published scholarship on South Asian Americans, tracking down cited sources and asking repositories holding these collections for permission to digitize. Many scholars of South Asian American history have heard about SAADA and use the site as a teaching tool, and won over by our mission, connect us directly to their sources. For example, in 2012, two historians approached one of our board members at an Asian American studies conference, alerting him to the private collection of a local Los Angeles woman whose grandfather was one of the first known Indian immigrants to the United States and an active member of the Gadar Party. A volunteer brigade made up of UCLA Information Studies students was formed to digitize the collection, which is now the largest in SAADA.<sup>5</sup> Increasingly, as our reputation has grown, donors of materials are hearing about us through word of mouth and making the initial contact with us via our website.

In addition to providing access to historical records, we also organize what we call “digital participatory microhistory projects,” that encourage community members to create new records documenting their experiences.<sup>6</sup> Our First Days project, for example, has enabled more than eighty immigrants to record brief video, audio, and video narratives describing their first day in the United States.<sup>7</sup> These projects call into question traditional dominant archival definitions of records as impartial byproducts of activity and fill in key gaps in the historical record for which pre-existing documentation does not exist. These projects also let community members know that archives are not just interested in famous people from the past, but in everyday people in the present. This project was loosely modeled after similar projects in which members of the public create and upload their own documentation, including the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University’s September 11 Digital Archive, Hurricane Digital Memory Bank, and Bracero History Archives, as well as the National Archives of the United Kingdom’s Moving Here Project.<sup>8</sup> We hope to launch similar projects in the

5. South Asian American Digital Archive, Donor: Rani Bagai, <http://www.saadigitalarchive.org/donor/rani-bagai>.

6. Michelle Caswell and Samip Mallick, “Collecting the Easily Missed Stories: Digital Participatory Microhistory and the South Asian American Digital Archive,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 42:1 (2014), 73-86.

7. South Asian American Digital Archive, “First Days,” <http://www.saadigitalarchive.org/firstdays>. For more information, see Caswell and Mallick, “Collecting the Easily Missed Stories.”

8. Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University, “September 11 Digital Archive,” <http://911digitalarchive.org>; Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University, “Hurricane Archive,” <http://www.hurricanearchive.org>; Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University, “Bracero Archive,” <http://braceroarchive.org>; National Archives, “Moving Here,” <http://www.movinghere.org.uk>.

future, including one in which we aim to encourage South Asian Americans to talk about their experiences in the wake of September 11, 2001.

In creating SAADA, we were inspired by a growing community archives movement. British archival scholars Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd define community-based archives as “collections of material gathered primarily by members of a given community and over whose use community members exercise some level of control.”<sup>9</sup> Although notions of identity and community are constantly shifting, community archives are independent grassroots efforts for communities to document their own commonalities and differences outside the boundaries of formal mainstream institutions. Such community archives have been formed around racial and ethnic identities (The Mayme A. Clayton Library and Museum, the archives of the Japanese American National Museum), gender and sexual orientations (The Lesbian Herstory Archives, the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives), political affiliation (Center for the Study of Political Graphics), and geographic location (The Southern California Library).

As I posit elsewhere, community archives generally cluster around five key principles: broad *participation* in all or most aspects of archival collecting from appraisal to description to outreach; shared ongoing *stewardship* of cultural heritage between the archival organization and the larger community it represents; *multiplicity* of voices and formats, including those not traditionally found in mainstream archives such as ephemera and artifacts; positioning archival collecting as a form of *activism* and ongoing *reflexivity* about the shifting nature of community and identity.<sup>10</sup>

These community collecting efforts are inherently political in nature and, as such, run counter to still-lingering claims of neutrality among some professional archivists. As Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd note, independent grassroots archival efforts first sprung up in response to the political and social movements of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>11</sup> In another publication, Flinn and Stevens position community archives as a part of larger social and political movements whereby groups who have been ignored, misrepresented, or marginalized by mainstream archival repositories launch their own archival projects as means of self-representation, identity construction, and empowerment.<sup>12</sup> These community-based archives serve as an alternative venue for communities to make collective decisions about what is of enduring value to them and to control the means through which stories about their past are

9. Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd, “Whose Memories, Whose Archives? Independent Community Archives, Autonomy and the Mainstream,” *Archival Science* 9:1-2 (2009): 71-86.

10. Michelle Caswell, “Toward a Survivor-Centered Approach to Human Rights Archives: Lessons from Community-Based Archives,” *Archival Science* 14: 3-4 (2014), forthcoming.

11. Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd, “Whose Memories, Whose Archives?,” 73.

12. Andrew Flinn and Mary Stevens, “‘It is Noh Mistri, Wi Mekin History’: Telling Our Own Story: Independent and Community Archives in the UK, Challenging and Subverting the Mainstream,” in *Community Archives: The Shaping of Memory*, eds. J. Bastian and B. Alexander (London: Facet, 2009), 3-28.

constructed. These are archives for the people, by the people, that often eliminate the traditional middlemen of the professional archivist and university or government repository. In these institutions, decisions about what materials to collect, how to describe those materials, and who should have access to them are made by community members, generally most of whom are not professionally trained archivists.

Power is central to this conversation; the need to uncover and provide a platform for previously marginalized voices distinguishes community archives from local geographically based historical societies. Flinn, Stevens and Shepherd's findings that political activism, community empowerment, and social change were prime motivating factors undergirding these fiercely independent archival efforts confirm this.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the creation of community archives can be seen as a form of political protest in that it is an attempt to seize the means by which history is written and to correct or amend dominant stories about the past. Flinn and Stevens assert: "The endeavor by individuals and social groups to document their history, particularly if that history has been generally subordinated or marginalized, is political and subversive. These 'recast' histories and their making challenge and seek to undermine both the distortions and omissions of orthodox historical narratives, as well as the archive and heritage collections that sustain them."<sup>14</sup> In this way, community archives are responses not only to the omissions of history as the official story written by a guild of professional historians, but the omissions of memory institutions writ large, and can thus be read as a direct challenge to the failure of mainstream repositories to collect a more accurate and robust representation of society.

Although we have successfully raised money from individuals and foundations focusing on Asian American issues, fundraising remains our biggest challenge. It has been quite difficult to convince government funding agencies and mainstream foundations that usually support traditional archives that SAADA is a legitimate archival institution, that we are committed to long-term access and preservation, and that we have appeal beyond a narrow "niche" community. Additionally, it has also been challenging to convince South Asian American community members that their history is important, that their philanthropic goals should be directed, in part, to organizations in the United States and not wholly to charities in South Asia, and that a small community-based nonprofit organization can properly steward resources. We operate on a very small budget; our revenue last year was \$37,485, only \$5,000 of which came from grant funding (a generous grant from the Asian Mosaic Fund). The remaining 87% came from individual gifts. With this small amount, the organization was able to hire Mallick as its first paid employee

13. Flinn, Stevens and Shepherd, "Whose Memories, Whose Archives?," 73.

14. Flinn and Stevens, "'It is Noh Mistri, Wi Mekin History': Telling Our Own Story: Independent and Community Archives in the UK, Challenging and Subverting the Mainstream," 3-4.



in 2013. Yet the struggle to secure funding streams is constant, with fundraising often occupying more staff and board time than collection development, digitization, or archival description. Although the funding challenges may seem insurmountable at times, we maintain an ongoing desire to remain independent so that the materials we collect remain under community control and are not subsumed under the rubric of larger institutional repositories.

Unlike almost all other archives, SAADA is run entirely on a post-custodial model.<sup>15</sup> This means that, rather than accept physical custody of records, we borrow records from individuals, families, organizations, and academic and government repositories, then digitize them, archivally describe them in a culturally appropriate manner, link them to related materials in the archives, and make them freely accessible online to anyone in the world with an internet connection. After digitization, the physical materials remain with the individual, family, organization, or repository from which they originated. This post-custodial model has worked wonders for us practically, as many of our individual and family donors could not bear to permanently part with their ancestors' records, but readily want to promote the use of them digitally. Similarly, we have worked with dozens of archival repositories that contain small fragments of collections related to South Asian Americans that lack the resources to digitize and contextualize them, but are more than happy to have SAADA do it. This model has enabled us to collaborate rather than compete with more established archival institutions.

Our post-custodial model also reflects the diversity and dispersal of South Asian American communities. Located across the country, in small towns and large cities, and encompassing vast religious, regional, linguistic, class, national, and political diversity, there is no singular South Asian American community with a central home base. It does not make sense, for example, to remove a Malayalam language church newsletter from its source community in Michigan to SAADA's headquarters in Philadelphia, where there is no significant Malayalam-speaking Christian community. A diasporic community demands dispersed archives. Making digital copies of records and returning the originals prevents us from cutting off these records from their provenances, allowing source communities to continue to make use of them locally even as we provide broad access to digital surrogates.

Given this post-custodial model, we have no publicly accessible physical space. All 1,800 of our items are freely available online to anyone in the world with an Internet connection. We had 134,000 unique visitors in 2013. Although we are currently working on ways to better track our users, we know anecdotally that materials from SAADA have been used in college courses in Asian American history, in curriculum for K-12 educators, and in dozens of theses, dissertations, and artistic projects. In the last year, 27% of our users accessed the site through mobile devices and we have redesigned our site's

15. Another example of a post-custodial archive is the University of Texas at Austin's Human Rights Documentation Initiative, <http://lib.utexas.edu/hrdi>.

interface to better accommodate this kind of mobile use. We have an active blog, Facebook page, Twitter account, email list, and a fundraising site on CauseVox.com, all of which allow us to reach out to our users and encourage their participation in the archival endeavor. As our online orientation shows, we are radically focused on access.

We are encouraged by ongoing scholarship in archival studies regarding how to use emerging web 2.0 technologies to open up archival appraisal and description for user participation. For example, Magia Krause and Elizabeth Yakel's work on harnessing digital platforms for participatory archival description, Isto Huvila's work on decentralized curation, and Katie Shilton and Ramesh Srinivasan's work on community participation in archival appraisal have all influenced our approach.<sup>16</sup> We are also inspired by the ongoing conversation in public history about shared authority and are continually looking for ways to demystify archival work for community members. For example, Michael Frisch's seminal work on oral history has inspired our First Days project, while the probing questions posed by Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski and others in *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World* have informed heated debates among the SAADA board regarding our policies for reuse and duplication for publication.<sup>17</sup> As a direct result of our engagement with both streams of scholarship (archival studies and public history), we are currently seeking grant funding to provide a platform that will allow users to tag, contextualize, and comment on archival records, essentially opening up archival description to online users and enabling us to share archival descriptive authority with our community of users. This type of online participation further counters the symbolic annihilation of South Asian Americans in archives by allowing their voices to be heard in the description of records. New user-created metadata will firmly place SAADA's records in the context of community knowledge, uses, and needs.

We are dedicated to the responsible stewardship of digital assets across time and format. Adhering to the LOCKSS principle ("Lots of Copies Keep Stuff Safe"), we keep back up servers in Philadelphia and Ann Arbor, and store data in the cloud. We digitize materials with the highest quality scanners using the Library of Congress's digitization guidelines when possible, but we have also scanned materials using portable low quality handheld scanners when individuals would not let their beloved grandfather's papers out of their

16. M. Krause and E. Yakel, "Interaction in Virtual Archives: The Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections Next Generation Finding Aid," *American Archivist* 70, no. 2, (Fall/Winter, 2007): 282-314; Isto Huvila, "Participatory Archive: Towards Decentralised Curation, Radical User Orientation, and Broader Contextualisation of Records Management," *Archival Science* 8, no. 1 (2008): 15-36; Katie Shilton and Ramesh Srinivasan, "Participatory Appraisal and Arrangement for Multicultural Archival Collections," *Archivaria* 63 (Spring, 2007): 87-101.

17. Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990); Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski, *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World* (Philadelphia: Pew Center for Arts and Heritage, 2011).

homes. With every collection we digitize, we strike a delicate balance between preservation, the wishes of the donor, and practical feasibility.

Despite having no physically accessible repository, we partner with South Asian American community organizations, student groups, arts coalitions, businesses, and social justice initiatives to run public programs around the country. For example, SAADA programs have taken place at universities such as the University of Michigan and Tufts, at museums such as the Philadelphia History Museum, at conferences like the Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting and the Midwest Asian American Students Conference, at South Asian American-owned businesses like the Samsaric Brewing Company, and at community organizations like the Asian Arts Initiative in Philadelphia and South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT).<sup>18</sup> At these community forums across the United States, SAADA board members solicit input on what our collection priorities should be and address any concerns or questions community members might have. At many of these events, we ask participants both what they would like to know more about their grandparents' generation and what they would like their grandchildren to know about them.<sup>19</sup> These questions help guide our collection priorities and get community members to start thinking about the importance of their personal stories to community history and to envision themselves in the archives.

In 2013, we broadened our original organizational mission to include creating a more inclusive society by giving voice to South Asian Americans through documenting, preserving, and sharing stories that represent their unique and diverse experiences. To this aim, we envision American and world histories that fully acknowledge the importance of immigrants and ethnic communities in the past, strengthen such communities in the present, and inspire discussion about their role in the future. In this regard, we see ourselves not just as archivists, but activists who see the past as a tool for empowering communities to work toward a more just future.<sup>20</sup>

So, six years and 1,800 digitized records since SAADA's founding, what impact have we had on public history? Have we changed how South Asian Americans see themselves? Have we changed how many Americans view their South Asian American neighbors?

The progress that community-based archives like SAADA make is slow. South Asian Americans continue to face many challenges. Racism is still prevalent. Hate crimes against South Asian Americans are still occurring at alarming rates. The damaging myth of South Asian Americans as a model minority is still pervasive and unfortunately gaining traction. Although the direct impact of community-based archives like SAADA is hard to measure, we have hope that our work is laying the groundwork for social inclusion in the

18. For a comprehensive list of our events, visit South Asian American Digital Archive, "Events," <http://www.saadigitalarchive.org/events>.

19. A selection of responses can be found here: South Asian American Digital Archive, "News," <http://www.saadigitalarchive.org/news/20140122-3494>.

20. South Asian American Digital Archive, "About," <http://www.saadigitalarchive.org/about>.

future. Given the long trajectory of archival use, in which remnants of the past are preserved in the present for use in the future, the symbolic annihilation marginalized communities face in the archives has far-reaching consequences for both how communities see themselves and how history is written for decades to come. If archives are to be true and meaningful reflections of the diversity of society instead of distorted funhouse mirrors that magnify privilege, then they must dispense with antiquated notions of whose history counts and make deliberate efforts to collect voices that have been marginalized by the mainstream.<sup>21</sup> If professional archivists remain complicit in the ongoing silencing of minority groups, mainstream archival institutions will cease to be relevant to a majority-minority society. As anthropologist Michel Trouillot reminds us, silences in history are compounded by archival omissions; power drives which events become records, which records become archives, which archives become narratives, and which narratives become histories.<sup>22</sup> Unless we disrupt this flow of privilege by actively engaging historically marginalized communities in archival collecting, by paying attention to stories we have never heard before, and by creating documentation where none previously existed, we will exacerbate crucial gaps in history and further alienate those who, like Mallick, grew up not seeing themselves in the past. Independent community archives like SAADA can fill the gap left by mainstream repositories, ensuring that the symbolic annihilation of minority communities is not projected on to the future. But such grassroots efforts can only succeed if dedicated people with a range of skills sets—technical, archival, historical, administrative—come together, volunteer long hours, and take matters into their own hands.

We are willing to do this hard work because we are encouraged by the stories we hear of community members using SAADA's collections to make meaning of the past and inspire change in the future. To add to the stories of Anandibai Joshee, Dalip Singh Saund, and Lalit Gadhia, we now have the stories of Anirvan Chatterjee and Barnali Ghosh, who organize the monthly "Berkeley South Asian Radical History Walking Tour" using, in part, materials from SAADA to inform the public about the long history of South Asian political activism in the United States.<sup>23</sup> In turn, they donate the proceeds of the tours to South Asian American community organizations like TriKone,

21. This echoes Howard Zinn's call for archivists to begin paying attention to everyday people, a call that was reflected in the work of Helen Samuels on documentation strategy and continues to be reflected in Verne Harris's work on "the archival silver" and welcoming "the other" into the archives. Howard Zinn, "Secrecy, Archives and the Public Interest," *The Midwestern Archivist* 2, no. 2 (1977): 14-26; Helen Samuels, "Who Controls the Past," *American Archivist* 49 (Spring 1986): 109-24; Verne Harris, *Archives and Justice* (Society of American Archivists: Chicago, 2006).

22. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon, 1995). To see an alternative take on how archives can respond to historic silences in a different context, see Michelle Caswell, *Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory, and the Photographic Record in Cambodia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014).

23. Berkeley South Asian Radical History Walking Tour, "About," <http://www.berkeley.southasian.org>.

Bay Area Solidarity Summer, and SAADA. We now also have the story of Monisha Bajaj, Ameena Ghaffar-Kucher, and Karishma Desai, three educators from the community organization South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) who used historic materials from SAADA to develop an anti-racism curriculum, “In the Face of Xenophobia: Lessons to Address Bullying of South Asian American Youth.”<sup>24</sup> The curriculum responds to the ongoing number of hate crimes South Asian Americans have faced in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and has already been implemented in numerous K-12 classrooms.

In light of these stories, we know that with every record we digitize, we are adding to a nuanced story that complicates simplistic and stereotypical views of the community. With every high-resolution file we save on multiple servers, we are helping young South Asian Americans find their place in society. And with every press of the scan button, we win one small battle against the symbolic annihilation of South Asian Americans in archives.

As for Mallick, creating SAADA has been cathartic. He says, “Learning about South Asian American history was transformational for me. Stories like that of Anandibai Joshee, Dalip Singh Saund, and Lalit Gadhia were not stories that I could learn about in school, read in textbooks or see covered in the media. But it was through learning about these stories and the many others like them that finally helped me see myself reflected in the American experience. For me knowing there is a long, rich and diverse history of South Asians in the United States counteracts that feeling of displacement.” We hope SAADA’s users feel the same way.

MICHELLE CASWELL is Assistant Professor of Archival Studies in the Department of Information Studies at the University of California Los Angeles. She is the author of *Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory and the Photographic Record in Cambodia* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2014). Her articles on archives, social justice, and collective memory of trauma have appeared in *Archival Science*, *Archivaria*, *The American Archivist*, *The Journal of Documentation*, *InterActions*, *First Monday* and *Libri*. She is also the co-founder of the South Asian American Digital Archive (<http://www.saadigitalarchive.org>), an online repository that documents and provides access to the diverse stories of South Asian Americans.

24. Monisha Bajaj, Ameena Ghaffar-Kucher, and Karishma Desai, “In the Face of Xenophobia: Lessons to Address Bullying of South Asian American Youth,” South Asian Americans Leading Together, <http://saalt.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/In-the-Face-of-Xenophobia.pdf>.