

“The Preservation of Knowledge and Culture in India, Indiana, and Beyond”  
Welcome for Symposium on  
Safeguarding India’s Documentary and Cultural Heritage

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## 1. INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you, Professor Sela, for that introduction and for your efforts in organizing today’s program.

It is a pleasure to welcome all of you to the Indiana University India Office and to this symposium on Safeguarding India’s Documentary and Cultural Heritage.

I first want to welcome our distinguished guests from

- the Ministry of Culture.
- Delhi University,
- Jawaharlal Nehru University,
- the National Museum Institute,
- the Aga Khan Trust for Culture,

and

- India's artistic community.

Your presence here reflects the type of mutually beneficial cooperation that we hope the new IU India Office will foster. Your participation in this symposium is also an indication of the paramount importance of addressing some of the major challenges that researchers and institutions face in working with and preserving the documents that reflect the vast and rich cultural heritage of this nation.

I also want to thank

- IU's Vice President for International Affairs, David Zaret, whose office provided funding for today's program;

and

- Shalini Choubey, the office coordinator of the IU India Office, for her contributions to organizing today's symposium.

## 2. THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVATION

For over 25 centuries, the great universities of the world have always had three fundamental missions:

- the creation of knowledge (that is, research and innovation),
- the dissemination of knowledge (that is, education and learning),

and

- the preservation of knowledge.

We tend, these days, though, to mainly think of the first two of these as the missions of a university. However, the advent of the digital age, with the development of the Internet and the World Wide Web, is giving new focus to the importance of the third mission of a university—the preservation of knowledge—and is allowing us to think about it in completely new ways.

Of course, this mission is not the exclusive domain of the university. And that is one of the reasons gatherings like this are so important, as they allow archivists, artists, and historians—who represent not only universities, but a variety of other organizations and interests—to gather, discuss the challenges and opportunities in the preservation of important historical materials, and to build networks for future collaboration.

The preservation of the historical artifacts of a civilization, whether they are manuscripts, historical documents, sculptures, or other works of art or architecture, is a formidable challenge for all countries, but particularly for India, a country whose long, rich, and varied history reaches back more than 5,000 years.

Preserving such material—and making it accessible—is, however, vitally important. Our understandings of ourselves as cultures depend on the robust engagement with our pasts.

### 3. DIGITAL PRESERVATION IN INDIA, INDIANA, AND BEYOND

During my last trip to India in the spring of this year, I had the great pleasure of witnessing the historical preservation work in which the American Institute of Indian Studies is engaged. They are creating a digital repository of tens of thousands of unique images of thousands of years of extraordinary Indian architecture, and of thousands of recordings of ancient Indian vocal and instrumental music.

The institute's efforts are a major step in preserving material that is an important part of India's history and culture—material that might otherwise disappear forever.

We are engaged in a similar effort at Indiana University through our Media Digitization and Preservation Initiative, an ambitious project to digitize, preserve, and make universally available by the time of IU's bicentennial in 2020, all of the perishable media

objects on IU's campuses, which number in the many hundreds of thousands. By preserving these films, audio recordings, videos, and other media holdings, we will we save a century of our national history while ensuring that they will be here to be studied and enjoyed for many years to come.

I also serve, incidentally, as chair of the Board of Directors of the recently established Digital Preservation Network in the U.S., the mission of which is to develop and implement a strategy aimed at the long-term preservation and curation of digital material and objects, not just for decades, but for centuries.

The preservation of the massive amount of data that this involves—generated through research and scholarly activity in the social and physical sciences, the arts and humanities, and by our research libraries—is an enormous challenge. But it is absolutely essential to institutions like IU and to faculty who want digitized materials to be around not just for their graduate students, but for their graduate students' graduate students, and beyond.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

I do hope that your time here today will be productive and intellectually stimulating.

This symposium is a wonderful example of how cooperation between Indiana University faculty and colleagues in India can lead to the realization of admirable goals that can improve research and scholarship in both our countries.

I am sure that this visit of the Indiana University delegation to India will be just one of many more such visits to come, so I look forward to seeing you again, and I wish you all the best as you engage in your important work today.

Thank you very much.