

# Modern South Asia Conference in Heidelberg

Report >

South Asia

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Heidelberg, Germany

At the end of this summer the South Asia Institute of the Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, Germany, hosted the European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, the seventeenth in a series of biennial conferences. Through the years this conference has become an important platform in Europe for the exchange of results of research on modern South Asia.

By *Netty Bonouvrié*

In the building of the Neue Universität, situated in the heart of the beautiful old town of Heidelberg, more than 300 participants from Europe, the United States, Australia, Japan, and South Asian countries assembled to attend this extremely well-organized conference. The panel sessions, spread over four days, offered a wide coverage of research on modern South Asia, while a number of recent documentaries on South Asian topics were also featured.

As the number of panels has increased considerably over the last decade – from nineteen at the twelfth conference in Toulouse, France, in 1994 to forty this year – participants, unfortunately, were forced to choose from among ten parallel sessions daily. Of course the organizers of the conference readily admitted to this. As professor S.K. Mitra, present director of the South Asia Institute, already remarked in his introduction, '[i]n spite of the best will in the world, no international conference can make every panel available to everyone'. The panels were organized around leading disciplines ranging from anthropology and religious studies to politics and linguistics; others focused on interdisciplinary themes like identity and diaspora. Current issues such as the relationship between India and Pakistan, the Kashmir conflict, and the nuclear capacities of India and Pakistan were also touched upon. Furthermore there seems to be a tendency to organize panels on specific regions, e.g. on the Himalaya area, on Indian states – as in Rajasthan Studies and Tamil Studies – and

on the various countries of the South Asian subcontinent such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Details of the panels and papers can be found on the Internet site of the conference, mentioned below.

The conference coincided with the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the South Asia Institute, which consists of eight departments and has become a major centre for interdisciplinary research and teaching. Results of interdisciplinary research were rendered visible by means of the exhibition *Benares. Views of a Holy City* at the Völkerkundemuseum of Heidelberg, which could be visited by a guided tour (for more information see the article by Martin Gaenzle and Jörg Gengnagel on the next page).

Considering the number of participants and the increase of contributions, this conference was certainly successful. The next European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, to be hosted by SASNET (Swedish South Asian Studies Network) and Lund University, will be held from 6 to 9 July 2004 in Lund, Sweden. ◀

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General information, the programme, the panel overview and abstracts of papers of the Seventeenth European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies held in Heidelberg can be found at:

[www.sai.uni-heidelberg.de/ecmsa/start.html](http://www.sai.uni-heidelberg.de/ecmsa/start.html)

Information on the forthcoming conference in Lund will soon be available at:

[www.sasnet.lu.se/research.html](http://www.sasnet.lu.se/research.html)