

SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES INSTITUTE

South Asian Studies Institute



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SASI Receives 3 Million+ Photographs

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On July 25th, 2024, the South Asian Studies Institute (**SASI**) received 3 million+ photographs for stewardship and preservation, taken by the legendary BC



photojournalist late Mr. Chandra Bodalia. The SASI plans to digitize, preserve, and provide open access to the photographs through its key initiative, **South Asian Canadian Digital Archive** with the **Royal BC Museum** (RCBM), and **BC Archives**.

SASI Director, Dr. Satwinder Bains states, “we are deeply beholden to the Bodalia family for trusting us with this family treasure. Their altruistic motive of his family to ensure that Chandra’s work is preserved and memorialized as well, is to be commended. For many years, they have been the loving stewards of this legacy of Chandra’s and the emotional heartfelt goodbye his son Vimal said to the photos will forever remain with us as caretakers of this valuable Canadian asset”

The Chandra Bodalia collection is the largest known private collection of a South Asian Canadian community



member in Canada and the largest bequest to UFV. The collection spans three decades,

from the 1980s to 2017, and covers a tremendously vast and diverse population demographic. Chandra Bodalia diligently documented the vibrant linguistic, social, cultural, political, economic, and religious diversity of South Asian Canadian communities in BC, Canada.

“I am very attached to all of Chandra’s photographs,” said Chanchalben Bodalia (Chandra’s mother). “They keep the memory of my son alive for me. But I was also concerned about the deteriorating condition of these photographs in our garage. I am, therefore, very thankful to SASI for taking the initiative of digitizing his photographs and to the RBCM for safely storing them. Thanks to them, my son and his contributions will be remembered forever.

Chandravadan “Chandra” Bodalia was born in 1948 in the village of Sisodra near Navsari in Gujarat, India. Bodalia



immigrated to Canada in 1976 and settled in Vancouver, BC. His artistic spirit followed him in all his work as he began a career as a photojournalist in the late 1980s. His photographs provide a vital link between the past and present since a significant amount of South Asian immigration to BC and Canada occurred from 1970s onwards. The collection is a vast and critically important body of records of arts and culture from diverse South Asian Canadian community events, activities, and supportive activism. The photographs also reflect the intercultural connections and collaborations within the immigrant communities in Canada as well as the ongoing complex transnational ties to the South Asian region.





“This is such a remarkable collection,” said Vimal Bodalia (Chandra’s son). “It shows the history of the Lower Mainland and the province whether it was political, religious, or events around the communities of British Columbia. Our family is so grateful that years of hard work and attending these events can be displayed for everyone to see. We are looking forward to seeing all the important historical events around the province that our father has captured.”

Director of Archives, Emma Wright affirms, “We are honoured to partner in preserving these records and assist the important community archiving efforts spearheaded by SASI. The Royal BC Museum’s ongoing support for the SACDA over the last few years reflects our commitment to amplifying marginalized and excluded voices. With the BC Archives future acquisition of this collection, we are actively working to address a more inclusive and representative archives.”

In partnership with the Royal BC Museum and the BC Archives, the SASI is responsible for the appraisal



and arrangement of the Bodalia collection to identify materials for permanent preservation, digitization and digital preservation. Following digitization, the physical collection will finally be transferred for description, rehousing, ongoing preservation and public access by the Royal BC Museum at their new PARC Campus facility. The collection will be openly and freely available on the South Asian Canadian Digital Archive (<https://sacda.ca>) in the following years.

“This is a monumental collection,” says Thamilini Jothilingam, Digital Archivist for the South Asian Canadian Digital Archive. “The width and breadth of the diversity of the South Asian Canadian communities Bodalia documented here is very important. In the context of

Canadian history and historiography that has systematically silenced and erased the South Asian Canadian lived experiences for decades and centuries, Bodalia's photographs hold the evidentiary and visual narratives, the ethnographical traces of a collective, intercultural, and communal presence."

The SASI welcomes all to join this collective archival journey!

If you know Chandra Bodalia and/or if you or your organization have been photographed by him at any events, please reach out to us. We invite you to become a Volunteer Community Curator and help us select, sort, classify, and identify people and places from the Chandra Bodalia collection.

Email us at sacda@ufv.ca to learn more.

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