



DATAH - Exploring the Digital Archive Tamil Agrarian History 1650-1950

French Institute of Pondicherry
22-23-24 February 2017

This **3 day seminar** will expose, explore and question a digital archive of Tamil agrarian history (DATAH) which was constituted during a five year project (2010-2016) by a team of the Social Sciences Department of the IFP. This project was funded by the British Library's Endangered Archives Program (Arcadia).

Alongside the **presentation of the project (day 1)** and the **seminar (day 2)** during which historians and anthropologist will present their personal readings of the archive, **an exhibition** will be held on the back wall of the IFP both for this seminar as well as for the Pondicherry Heritage Festival. Further **a roundtable (day 3)** will be devoted to exploring the feasibility of pursuing the collection of documents and to assessing strategies and constraints of digital archives in Tamil Nadu with several institutional partners.

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About DATAH

The aim of the DATAH project was to create a digital archive of documents of socio-historical relevance to historians, anthropologists, sociologists and linguists. Most of the documents digitized during this five year project (2011-2016) are destined to disappear in the near future given both the very humid climate of southern India and neglected condition in which they are stored. These documents, recorded on paper, palm-leaves and copper plates provide a rare and unique opportunity to glimpse a variety of aspects of social history of village life in the more remote parts of the Tamil region at a time when new power structures and social identities were being forged both with and against local traditional feudal systems and British colonial legislations.

One of the specificities of DATAH is that the documents we digitized are scattered in the homes of Tamil villagers, especially the descendants of traditional power holders, who are unaware of the importance such documents can have for understanding social history. Though unaware of the scholarly value, the document holders are not prepared to part with their forefathers' documents, such as depositing them in the local archives- as was recently demonstrated by the failure of the Madurai District Archives and Historical Records office to collect such documents despite repeated appeals to the public. Furthermore, local archives do not have the means to carry out fieldwork and will not pursue digital preservation of documents that are not destined to be in their keep. The documents contained in the DATAH archive open new avenues of analysis at the level of micro-history of rural India, a field for which there is a lack of research material since the colonial Revenue Records as well as the "Village Notes" of the Settlement Surveys do not contain the types of documents that were collected.

DATAH presently contains 82 collections comprising 5 314 digitized documents and consisting of 83 378 images. These documents are viewable on the website of the EAP:

EAP 314: 10 collections, 652 documents, 3 460 images

http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP314

EAP 458: 36 collections, 3 039 documents dated between 1777 and 1985, 36 774 images

http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP458

EAP 689: 36 collections, 1623 documents, 43 144 images

http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP689;r=41