On 24-25 February 2003, the SAI and the Arts Faculty of Delhi University held a joint workshop in Delhi. Members of both institutes explored shared research interests, making the formal Memorandum of Understanding come alive.

Founded in 1922, Delhi University is known today not only as one of the largest universities in the world with over 200,000 students, but also as one of the most prestigious centres of scholarship and academic teaching on the South Asian subcontinent. Three years have passed since representatives of Delhi University and the University of Heidelberg signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). While informal co-operation between scholars of the two universities is of much longer standing, this formal agreement has the objective of expanding the areas of collaboration by creating an institutional infrastructure. For this purpose an inter-university coordination committee was set up.

When Delhi University’s Dean of International Relations, Prof. S.K. Tandon, visited Heidelberg last September, it was decided to bring together a group of scholars from Heidelberg’s SAI and from the Arts Faculty of Delhi University as a first practical step towards “breathing life” into the MoU. An interdisciplinary workshop in Delhi was to explore concrete possibilities of cooperation. Accordingly, a delegation of ten scholars attached to the SAI’s History and Indology departments, headed by Professors Monika Boehm-Tettelbach and Gita Dharampal-Frick, visited Delhi University in February to participate in a workshop, which was also attended by the SAI’s Delhi representative. Delhi University was represented by 13 academics working in the fields of history, literary studies, political and social sciences.

The purpose of the workshop was to compare notes and thereby identify concrete areas of cooperation. With this in mind, 18 participants introduced their current research projects in brief statements, after each of which the floor was opened to discussion. What could well have been a tedious exercise turned out to be a door- and eye-opener. The lively and sophisticated discussions indicated clearly that there was much more common ground than expected in the research conducted at Delhi and Heidelberg.

Shared research interests include a wide range of themes spanning from the history of archaeology, and the emergence of a North Indian print culture, to religious and social conflict in contemporary mega-cities. As a result, three inter-university project groups were formed with the intention of coordinating research, organising workshops and producing joint publications. The groups will focus on three areas of research: “State practices and the articulation of citizenship”, “Biographies and Autobiographies in Persian and Urdu in North India” and “Transnational worlds of labour”.

The concluding session of the workshop discussed broader perspectives of cooperation. Our Delhi colleagues stressed their interest in joint activities involving not only the SAI but the Humanities and Social Sciences of Heidelberg University in general.

In order to regularise cooperation, annual meetings were agreed upon and a Working Committee was set up consisting of Prof. Shahid Amin, Prof. Om Prakash, Dr. Nayanjot Lahiri and Dr. Dilip Menon from Delhi University and Prof. Monika Boehm-Tettelbach, Prof. Gita Dharampal-Frick, Dr. Evelin Hust, Dr. Srilata Müller and Dr. Ravi Ahuja from the University of Heidelberg. Based on the positive experience of student exchange between the two universities during the past few years, exchange programmes will now be extended to graduate students and faculty. Moreover, joint workshops on themes of shared interest will be held in turn at the Arts Faculty of Delhi University and the SAI.

At the end of the workshop, the Delhi University’s Dean of International Relations, Prof. S.K. Tandon, was impressed with the progress achieved and optimistic regarding future cooperation between the two universities. The Delhi workshop was, in sum, a stimulating academic experience and has opened up new and concrete fields of cooperation. What lies ahead now is the task of providing the financial and infrastructural preconditions for the realisation of these perspectives. Last but not least, on behalf of Profs. Monika Boehm-Tettelbach and Gita Dharampal-Frick (and indeed of all members of the SAI-delegation), I should like to express our sincere gratitude to the University of Heidelberg (and in particular to Dr. H. Joachim Gerke, head of the Akademisches Auslandsamt) for the generous financial assistance without which this international academic enterprise would not have been possible.

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