

An Eye of Inquiry

SHLOK TRIVEDI

School of Liberal Studies, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University Delhi

"An Eye of Inquiry" visualises the archive as a dynamic, interpretive space shared by historians, artists, and thinkers alike. Evoking memory, fragmentation, and inquiry, the artwork captures the archive's role beyond preservation, foregrounding its potential in shaping knowledge through perception, imagination, and active engagement with material remains.

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Bernard S. Cohn points to "Archives" as one of the three places where historians are found in their professional capacities.¹ But, I also visualize them as realms where amateur capacities can be explored as well, since we, or probably only I, mostly live in the past. This cover illustration, baptised as "An Eye of Inquiry," tries to capture the essence of the profound relationship between not just the archive and historians, but also journalists, researchers, writers, and artists involved in the praxis of interpreting, uncovering, or simply engaging with tangible or intangible material. The inspiration for the design dawned during one of my occasional, inconsequential flickerings through my old Instagram handle's archived stories. Technically, a non-professional personal digital archive of memories, it now left me wondering about the serendipity of designing a cover page from my archived artwork. God is great indeed. Don't worry, I am not about to go off on a tangent.

At the heart of this cover page lies an artistic eye anchored to a sublime background in the hues of brown. This eye (Figure 1), with a potent and introspective gaze, is not merely a yielding organ of sight. It extends beyond the threshold of simple reading and empirical observation, and rather

¹ Bernard S. Cohn, "An Anthropologist among the Historians: A Field Study," in *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 3-5.

represents an assertive agency of understanding, perceiving, and interpreting material to produce useful knowledge. Moreover, the rich tinctures of blue, red, and orange try to add depth to this dimension. To convey an association between the archive and its material, albeit not limited to it, there descends a metaphorical beam of light from the eye's curvature illuminating the archival material. With the ray cascading on the raised book and other elements, the overall composition tries to convey the consumption of raw ideas from the quintessential vessels of knowledge to ultimately produce new scholarship.

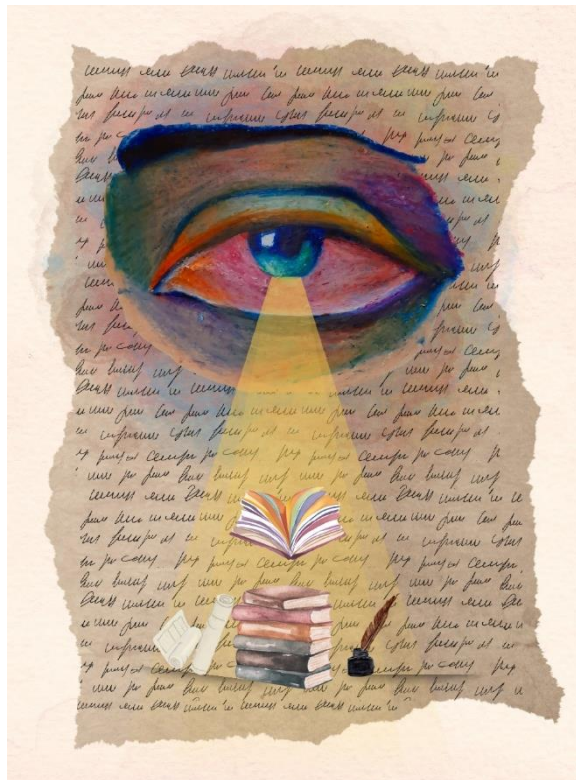


Figure 1: An Eye of Inquiry

The background of the central piece is minimalistic yet evocative, contributing towards the synthesis of the overall concept of the archive. It, therefore, uses an element of torn fragments of a scripture to convey the notion of lacuna that people face when dealing with archival materials, often leaving the conclusions fractured and researchers frustrated. Simultaneously, it highlights the often-neglected reality of the archive and the patience necessary for its in-depth analysis. It also acknowledges an ever-dynamic and continuously evolving space of new ideas and avenues with a fixed gaze of inquiry. This

central piece is juxtaposed with the background of water-based light parchment paper tone, done not only to make it visually appealing but also to create an immersive or transportive feeling of being in a warm archive.

Finally, acknowledging the importance of breaking the surface tension through a gaze of inquiry, delving beyond the realm of what is known, to learn, unlearn, and relearn through a dialogue with archives as agents of primary meaning-making to produce knowledge is what constitutes “An Eye of Inquiry”. Hence, for a journal dedicated to fostering a unique perspective on archives within the humanities and social sciences, where archives should not be treated as mere repositories, this work of art conspicuously tries to encapsulate what “Reading the Archive” entails in its entirety.

References

Cohn, Bernard S. *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.