

Awards and Scholarships

Archie Motley Memorial Scholarship for Students of Color

By Aparna Subramanian



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I am grateful and honored to receive the 2021 Midwest Archives Conference Archie Motley Memorial Scholarship for Students of Color.

I come from a middle-class family in India where knowledge is of foremost importance, but the costs of acquiring certain skills are often beyond our means. My parents supported my decision when I chose an unconventional career like archiving and sought out jobs in this sector where projects and salaries are sporadic. Grants and scholarships helped me on my incredible journey to the Moving Image Archiving and Preservation (MIAP) program at NYU Tisch School of the Arts.

I have worked on various projects in the arts and culture sector that focus on sound, audio, video, film, and community archives for about four years, including a project by the Ministry of Culture in India. I was also a member of an international sound recording expedition team where I documented Indigenous music across tribes and traditions in India and Nepal. While I worked in India, I grew familiar with the bored looks, “but why?” expressions, and sometimes even pity. Few people understood that archiving is a field that

relates to established and emerging cultural norms. Plus, there are challenges. Few resources are allocated to state-controlled institutions for archival projects. Furthermore, I felt the lack of scope for archival training as no pan-Indian and pan-Asian programs for film preservation and archiving exist on any significant scale except some limited private efforts. It became evident to me that for archival institutions in India to survive and become sustainable, the building of archival resources in the region is imperative.

The training I received through the NYU MIAP program and my internships at Weill Cornell Medicine, Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, and the Regional Media Legacies Project helped me understand the state of media archiving and management in different cultural institutions—some funded, some underfunded—and the availability or lack of archivists on board, raising the question of labor resources for archival work.

The cross-cultural experience of studying abroad helped me to acknowledge the similar roadblocks that the archiving profession faces globally. It has given me a perspective to review and reflect on issues in the existing archival practices of India. I do not regret a single day of my educational and professional path. I believe in the circular development of people and the concept of multipotentialities as opposed to the linear development of “up the ladder.” This is how we can level up as a diverse society, reveal unknown potential, and bring personal and professional fulfillment to individuals.

I graduated in May 2021 amid a lot of chaos as my family in India and I were in the eye of the storm due to COVID-19’s second wave. The pandemic forced me to complete most of my coursework and internships online. Nevertheless, the new virtual and hybrid norms taught us through agility and drive to keep things going by being resilient.

I offer my heartfelt gratitude to the scholarship committee at Midwest Archives Conference for choosing me as a recipient of the 2021 Archie Motley Memorial Scholarship.