

Ujaan Ghosh, IRIS Research Report

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Pilgrimage Tourism and the making of Colonial Puri

My research focuses on the colonial urbanization of Puri, a small town in the province of Odisha in Eastern India. The temple of Jagannath in Puri makes it one of the four dhams (sacred abodes) of Hinduism. The yearly annual Chariot festival (Rathayatra) of the temple used to draw a massive annual pilgrim traffic in Puri in the pre-colonial period. This pilgrim traffic exponentially increased with the coming of colonialism leading to the development of a new urban modality in the center. During the colonial period, Odisha was initially under the jurisdiction of the government of Bengal. After 1911, Bengal was separated as Odisha and Bihar together served as one administrative province. The IRIS research grant helped me carry out archival research in two separate locations in India, Kolkata and Delhi.

My time in Kolkata was first spent in looking at the nineteenth century colonial archival records on Puri. As mentioned, since Puri and Odisha were a part of the British Bengal Province, early records about Puri are housed in the West Bengal State Archives, in Kolkata. I went through the records of the Judicial and Revenue department of the Government of Bengal from the year 1803 (when Odisha first came under British rule) to 1911. I extensively went through these two sets of records as issues of early urban infrastructural development was found here. The revenue department records particularly focus on issues of urbanization. I encountered records about Public works, such as the building of the Jagannath Trunk Road (which ran from Midnapur to Puri), the various government offices, pilgrim shades etc. These records shed light on how colonial urbanization began in Puri. The records of the Judicial department on the other hand throws light on the ways in which the colonial government interacted with the flow of pilgrims in the urban center.

The rest of my time in Calcutta was spent at the library of *Bangiya Sahitya Parishad*. This library is known for the collection of nineteenth and twentieth century Bengali periodicals and travelogues. In the colonial period, with the proliferation of the printing press many Bengalis documented their journey to Puri and they are often published as monographs or as serialized articles in periodicals. These travel literatures were nascent literary expressions and documented how travelling practices in Puri evolved from pilgrimage to tourism. Issues of gender, caste, religion and interaction with the surrounding landscape recur in this literature that was useful for my project. During my stay, I went through this travel literature extensively and photocopied important ones.

In Delhi, I spent two weeks in the National Archives of India. I went through the serialized administrative report of the Province of Bihar and Orissa (post 1911). These records documented important administrative events on a monthly or two monthly basis. Noteworthy events of crime, education, public health (such as spread of epidemic), were recorded in these reports. Simultaneously, I also went through the records of the railway board. The Railway line that connected Puri with Howrah, in Calcutta, was completed in 1897. These records help us understand how pilgrimage interacted with the technologies of imperial rule. The coming of the railways had a huge impact on the travelling practices of the subcontinent as pilgrimage cycles were altered considerably. The records of the railway board helped me understand how these changes played out in the particular context of Puri.

The IRIS research award helped me with my travel fare to India and helped me with my costs during my stay. I have prepared a research paper for a course based on the travelogues which I intend to use as one of my dissertation chapters. The revenue and judicial documents of the government of Bengal will contribute to the first chapter of my dissertation as well. Finally, the

summer fieldwork has helped me write for independent dissertation grants. I have applied for dissertation funding in Social Science research Council (IDRF) which value pre-dissertation fieldwork. The grant will bolster my application process for the IDRF scholarship and any other scholarship that I may have to apply for in the future.