

STATEMENT OF GRANT PURPOSE

Andrew Otis, India, History

Early Press in India and the Bengal Renaissance

On June 16, 1781, an armed gang of Europeans and sepoys (their Indian employees), surrounded James Hicky's house, beat down his gate with sledgehammers and overpowered his servants to force their way inside. As curious onlookers gathered, the Europeans and sepoys produced a warrant for his arrest. He was accused of writing "gross libels" against the Calcutta Government in his newspaper, the *Bengal Gazette*, recognized as the first paper founded in Asia. What followed were years of show trials and punitive sentencing that condemned Hicky to a decade in debtors' prison and a life as a pauper.

Hicky's defense stands out as the media's first attempt in colonial Calcutta to assert free speech rights. Calcutta's early wealth of media sources attested to its reputation as India's intellectual capital. These media were formative for the Bengal Renaissance, a 19th-century social reform movement crucial to developing the concept of India as a nation-state. The Renaissance's rich cultural and scientific heritage can be seen in the influence of thinkers such as Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo, yet there remains an under-studied link between newspaper development in Bengal and the Renaissance. With a Fulbright grant, I will study the progenitor to the Bengal Renaissance: the British driven growth of the press in India, specifically looking at the press in colonial Calcutta and the effect it had on intellectual movements in Bengal. Many early Renaissance leaders, including Raja Ram Mohan Roy, had backgrounds as editors and publishers, but the history and tradition through which they learned their skills deserve additional scholarship. Other papers, founded at first by Europeans, followed the *Bengal Gazette*, slowly forming a modicum of a free press in India. Newspapers are important to society due to their ability to expose corruption, guide discourse and act as strong influencers of public opinion. These early papers, with their expressions of free thought and vigorous debate, are integral to understanding the Bengal Renaissance and contemporary India.

Professor Kingshuk Chatterjee of Calcutta University's History Department and Professor Samarpita Mitra of Jadavpur University's History Department have expressed enthusiasm for my project and have agreed to mentor me. The resources and rare books at these institutions, which specialize in Bengal's colonial history, will be critical for my study. Additionally, I have discussed my project with Professor Bikramjit De of the West Bengal Juridical Sciences University, who has an intimate knowledge of Calcuttan history, and with Professor Benjamin Zachariah of Presidency University in Kolkata, whose expertise on social and intellectual South Asian history will help me understand the context of connections between early newspapers and the Renaissance.

My study will commence with research into English newspapers in Calcutta of the late 18th century and progress to Raja Ram Mohan Roy's *Sambad Kaumudi*, one of the first Indian language newspapers. This stage will include thorough research of Kolkata's resources and will provide me with a solid understanding of trends in newspaper development. The second stage will draw concrete connections between ideas formulated by editors and later Renaissance thinkers. Investigating the linkage between Bangla and English language newspapers will be a centerpiece to this section of my study. My study will be conducted in English, and will be enhanced through a Critical Language Enhancement Award, which will enable me to understand written Bangla in relevant papers. If necessary, my affiliates have assured me that supporting faculty members can assist in translating passages. The third stage will synthesize the research and will conclude with a scholarly paper examining the importance of these early newspapers on the Bengal Renaissance and ideas of Indian nationhood. Each stage should last three months.

My past research and work on related topics support my preparation for this project. As an

undergraduate, I took several courses on colonial Indian history while studying abroad in Hyderabad, India. I completed and presented a senior history honors thesis titled, "Press Freedoms in Colonial South Africa and India." As a comparative study, it attempted to distill certain truths about the press in former British colonies: patterns of expansion, government suppression, and the effects of competition. It involved collecting resources from universities around the United States. I also have training in document transcription through a course at the University of Rochester which will help me preserve fragile sources in India. Later, I was awarded a grant through my University's Phi Beta Kappa chapter to conduct research on global 18th-and 19th-century newspapers at the British Library in Colindale, London as an extension of my undergraduate thesis. There, I exhausted relevant primary documents, including letters and memorandums. From this research, I am composing a non-fiction book on Hicky's *Bengal Gazette* which will contextualize British-Indian relations and the development of a free press in the early 19th century. A focus on British colonial newspapers has provided me a coherent sense of world affairs during the 19th century.

I maintained my interest in South Asian media history after departing the British Library, and have learned that many primary source materials remain only in Kolkata. Documents pertaining to early legal history are generally located in three locations: the National Library of Calcutta, the Victoria Memorial and the Calcutta High Court. Microfilms of Calcutta Supreme Court Justice John Hyde's meticulous legal notebooks, which contain useful accounts of libel trials, are located at the National Library of Calcutta while originals are located at the Victoria Memorial. As part of my research, I have been in contact with two professors of colonial Indian law (Mitra Sharafi of the University of Wisconsin and Hannah Muller of Harvard University) from whom I have learned that little research has been conducted due to difficulty accessing some of these records. The Calcutta High Court provides access to its 18th-century records after a weeks-long permission process, underscoring the need to reside in Kolkata for an extended period of time. It is important that research be conducted on location because Kolkata has the world's premier source of relevant material. Moreover, it is possible to connect the locations of events two centuries ago to their current locations, which will provide a very real context to the subject matter and help me understand modern day India.

I have two projects that will complement my research and build off of Kolkata's cultural heritage. I have reached out to the Asiatic Society, Kolkata's historical society, through which much research into Bengal history has occurred. With the contacts I have gained from the Asiatic Society, I will start a lecture series on aspects of Bengal media history. History is best experienced in first person, so I will also partner with Calcutta Walks, an organization that tours both locals and foreigners around the city, and offer a tour that takes walkers to important historical locations such as where editors were jailed or where printing presses operated. My knowledge of Kolkata's history will provide a unique perspective for the walks. I will make tours accessible by drafting a printed itinerary for guides of Calcutta Walks to follow. Through these efforts I hope to provide sustainable ways for Bengalis to experience their own history.

Understanding the time requirements of conducting research in India, I plan to produce a scholarly work based on my research at the grant's conclusion. A Fulbright will build off my previous research and will be foundational to my future graduate studies, which will culminate in a history Ph.D with a concentration on South-Asian history. With Fulbright, I will have gained otherwise unattainable field work necessary to accurately and richly contribute to this intriguing yet under researched field. I am exploring an important facet of India's past and colonial history which marked the beginnings of India's very strong press and intellectual foundations. This project will increase the level of mutual knowledge of India's history and the importance it holds for modern day society.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

Andrew Otis, India, History

Two years ago, while looking for resources in my university's library stacks, I noticed an unmarked brown covered book, dusty with age and disuse. Inside, I found the *Memoirs* of William Hickey, lawyer for newspaperman James Hicky. As a member of England's upper class in the late 18th century, he represented clients in India, the West Indies, and England, all of which he documented in precise detail. His descriptions of Calcutta struck me, with their colorful characters, complaints of a "deleterious climate" and entanglements between Indians and British. Much like a travel guide, he introduced me to my thesis topic and subsequent research.

The semester before, I visited Kolkata while studying abroad in Hyderabad, India. The city's stately Victoria Memorial, perched on the green Maidan, complemented the history percolating through its crowded streets. It was my first time in the British Raj's perennial administrative center. Its heritage, venerable institutions and their impact on the city were apparent in a different way than Hyderabad, a city the British never colonized. Studying abroad in South Africa and India has directed me to look at the fascinating complexities of colonial history and to investigate Calcuttan history through the works of P. Thankappan Nair as well as imperialist writers H.E.A. Cotton, H. E. Busteed, and W.K. Firminger. In this manner, I have been drawn to history not just in the way it can preserve information but how the reader can be transported into another world, and other lives. Printed words hold incredible majesty and importance in many societies, which was evident by the reverence for books I saw while I studied Hindi and Indian history in Hyderabad. Studying abroad has given me a respect for other cultures and a desire to explore history that was once unfamiliar to me. After college, I interned as an editor at National Public Radio. I remember one story I worked on, written by commentator Sandip Roy about Manohar Aich, a centenarian and former Mr. Universe, who had lived in Calcutta and seen the city change during his lifetime. Sandip's eloquent writing and vivid evocations inspired me to write this application.

As a child, in the rush preparing for school each morning, I found calm in the newspapers placed on our table. The papers were inviting, beckoning me to read their stories that transported me to foreign wars, tragedies and celebrations. I have since discovered their value as a tool to record history and culture and have been enchanted by original bound editions of many notable 18th- and 19th-century papers while researching at the British Newspaper Library. These newspapers reflected fears and aspirations within a society, as editors opined on social reform movements and society's ills. There is much to learn, even within the advertisements and price currents of old newspapers, such as how much goods cost or fashions and popular items. Perhaps most of all, these newspapers provide a reflection of life that we can still see vestiges of in the contemporary era.

I took my interest in media to my university, where I was drawn into student journalism. I had the fortune to work in numerous positions at my campus newspaper as well as an editor and writer at the University of Cape Town's student newspaper while studying abroad. Back home, I spearheaded a project to establish digital records for my college newspaper. Our records were largely non-existent, and we deleted articles posted online each week to make room for newer editions. I found the project important as a way to make history more accessible to others. The wealth of information contained in articles from the 1890s thrilled me, including how they told stories about my university and paper. It was during my search through archives of my college paper that I developed the idea to study British colonial newspapers, an idea that later morphed into my honors history thesis. History and journalism share a most integral similarity: they are both about weaving narratives into a story that stimulates, intrigues and captures the mind. I hope to write such stories.

**U.S. STUDENT FULBRIGHT PROGRAM
Language Self Evaluation**

FORM 7

Applicants should complete a separate **Language Self Evaluation** for each language needed for their proposed grant project or as required by the host country according to the Country Summary.

Remember, unless you have no knowledge of the host country language, you must have FORM 8 completed by a foreign language evaluator.

Please answer the following questions regarding the language being evaluated.

1. Language being evaluated: Bangla/Bengali

2. Indicate if you are applying for the Critical Language Enhancement Award in the language evaluated on this form: Yes No

3. Indicate your evaluation of your knowledge/skills level in the language indicated in question 1.

None

Basic (no formal study or minimal high school)

Beginning (less than 1 year college or equivalent)

Intermediate (1-2 years college or equivalent)

Advanced (more than 2 years college or equivalent)

Fluent (native or near native)

4. Indicate how you have learned the language. You may check all that apply.

Formal Study

Self-study

Mother tongue

Spoken at home

Studied/lived in country (indicate country & amount of time in question 5)

Other

COMMENTS:

5. Indicate amount of time spent in formal study and/or time studying or living in a country where language is spoken and the country

Hindi, Formal Study, 1 Semester, studying abroad at the University of Hyderabad

6. If the language used in the host country and/or in your project is not commonly taught in the U.S. and/or you have not enrolled in formal study of the language, indicate what steps you have taken to learn this language to date.

Hindi is useful, in a comparative sense, to complement my self study of Bengali. I have been practicing Bengali script and have been watching culturally important Bengali movies to informally become familiar with spoken Bengali. I will be following my partner, a 2012-2013 Fulbright student researcher, to Sri Lanka where I will further work on my Bengali skills.

7. If you do not currently have the level of language proficiency necessary to communicate effectively, orally and in writing, in the host country language, indicate what you are doing now and what you plan to do to bring your language facility to an acceptable level by the time a grant would begin.

N/A