

## ODISHA DIARY

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- (1) I was invited to give 2 lectures in late January 2012 at National Institute of Science and Technology ([NIST](#)), Berhampur, Orissa. This gave me an opportunity to see Orissa after 30 years.



- (2) NIST is run by a dynamic IIT Kanpur alumnus Sangram Mudali. He is trying to set up a first class Institute of Technology in Orissa almost modeled on IITs. I gave a lecture on [social entrepreneurship](#) to his MBA/engineering students.

- (3) NIST also conducts a program (funded by DST) called [Inspire](#). In this program the toppers of Orissa schools (CBSE, ICSE and Odisha board) are invited for a 4-5 days camp at NIST campus to be inspired to join S&T stream for higher studies. I was the chief guest of this program this time. It was a wonderful experience to interact with nearly 400 bright students of [class XI/XII and to respond to their sharp questions](#). This was the third time that "Inspire" camp is being conducted at NIST.



- (4) Orissa of 2012 is very changed from that of 1981! After all the country has changed so why should Orissa be different? In 1981 Bhubaneshwar was a

sleepy town which could be easily explored by riding a cycle rickshaw. Today it is a sprawling, noisy and congested city.

- (5) In 1981 I and my wife Nandini had visited Orissa in late December. The occasion was the honeymoon trip of my brother Alok. We had visited Puri, Konarak, Chilika lake Nandan-Kanan and Bhubaneshwar. We did the same routine this time also except for the visit to Nandan-Kanan.
- (6) Puri visit is not complete without the Jagannath Temple darshan. In 1981 there was hardly any crowd at the temple. We had gone there in the morning and could not have the darshan of Lord Jagannath since the inner sanctum doors were closed. So the only thing we could do was to see the architecture of the temple from the outside. Nevertheless we were surrounded by the aggressive Pandas and when I said that I am not interested in their services they immediately declared me a Muslim. My beard also did not help the matter. I got a feeling that I will be lynched since no muslim is allowed inside the temple. Suddenly one Panda announced that I could not be a muslim since my brother and his wife had performed an arti! This saved me from an ugly situation.
- (7) This time we took the services of a Panda organized by the hotel in Puri where we were staying. So he took us straight to the inner Sanctum where the idols of Jaganath, Subhadra and Balram are installed. The whole place was very dirty and slippery and it was really difficult to walk inside. Our Panda invited us to do a parikrama of the idols but the floor being extremely slippery, we declined.
- (8) The whole temple was chockfull of devotees and provided a very different sight than that which we had 30 years ago. At that time we could have a leisurely stroll inside the complex. Also in 1981 we could come straight to the temple door riding a cycle rickshaw. Nowadays the cycle rickshaws have vanished from almost all the cities of Orissa. They have been replaced by polluting auto rickshaws. Also this time we were asked to park the car about a kilometer away and had to walk through a sea of humanity to reach

the temple. Besides no cameras or cell phones are allowed inside the temple premises.

- (9) In 1981 there were only 2 hotels on the beach of Puri. One was Orissa Tourism Development Corporations (OTDC) Panth Niwas and the other was a Railway guest house. Both were situated on the beach and one had a beautiful view of the beach from the verandah of these hotels. Today there are hundreds of luxury hotels lining the beach and it was difficult to locate both Panth Niwas and Railway hotel. We stayed in a very nice hotel which had a private entrance to the beach. The Puri beach is very long and lovely and hence it was a pleasure to walk on it in the morning for a couple of hours. The beach was clean and the weather was lovely. Being a Sunday the beach was nearly deserted at 6:30 a.m.



- (10) Visiting Konark Temple we had similar experience of increased population. If I remember correctly in 1981 we had parked our taxi right across the road in front of the entrance of the temple. There were hardly many tourists in 1981. This time the crowd of tourists was unbelievable. It was also due to the pilgrims who had flocked there to bathe in Chandrabhaga on the occasion of Magh mela. Besides we also saw a few of the erotic sculptures missing. Probably they have been moved to some other museums in the country.



- (11) The temple was being renovated and yet the tourists were allowed to go to the first floor. It had a six to eight feet parapet without railings. Thus it was dangerous to walk and with the crush of the tourists it is very easy to fall from this floor. Though Konark is a World Heritage site, it has been kept

very poorly and the temple is falling apart. Archeological Survey of India (ASI) has put in plain stones where the original frescos existed. With tremendous technology available in profile carving it should be easy to carve the original patterns into the stones. We as a nation can never keep our heritage properly and whatever exists is also allowed to deteriorate. We visited the Konark Museum but were disappointed that the missing sculptures were not there also.



(12) From Konarak we went through the back roads to Barkul on Chilka lake. The 2 hours journey took us through lovely Orissa forests and in January it was green and in full bloom of marigold, bhamuria and other flowers.

(13) At Barkul we stayed in the Panth Nivas (run by OTDC). It was overpriced and in poor condition. It is a typical State government hotel with staff being careless and having no interest in improving tourism. The whole surrounding of Panth Nivas is a huge shit house (used by the boat drivers, owners, and pilgrims going to the kalijai temple) and except for lovely breeze from the lake (our cottage was almost touching the lake shore) there was hardly anything worth writing home about. The food was quite ordinary including the breakfast. I was told that outside dhabas serve far better food than Panth Nivas.



(14) In the morning we hired a boat to take us to the Nalabana bird sanctuary which was situated 18 kms from the hotel. The lovely 2½ hours boat ride which went through the choppy lake waters and with cold wind and salt

water spray on the face and the body it was a thrilling experience. Nowadays it is not possible to go right inside the bird sanctuary and touch the islands where the birds nest. So we had to simply see the birds from quite a distance and through the binoculars. We saw quite a number of sea gulls, cormorants and migratory ducks. Also saw many flocks of cranes flying but their landing site was not visible.



(15) This was a far cry from our 1981 visit to Chilika. Then we had stayed in the Panth Nivas in Satpada and had an unrestricted passage to the Sanctuary. Thus we could go right to the nesting islands of birds. In that trip we saw huge flocks of flamingos, pelicans, cranes among others. Besides if I remember right we were the only occupants of the Panth Nivas.

(16) Though my lectures were in NIST, Berhampur, we stayed in a nice hotel in Gopalpur on sea – a beach resort and 15-20 kms from NIST. The beach is



not as massive or grand as Puri's. Besides it is also used as a huge defecating ground for local residents in the early morning. Still a long brisk walk in the cool morning was very invigorating. In the old days Gopalpur was one of

the major shipping ports of East India Company. It still has number of ruins of British buildings and also has a beautiful light house.

(17) Most of the towns of Orissa are dotted with various types of educational Institutes. Orissa, like the rest of the country, is getting on the education bandwagon with most of these colleges being nothing else but money

making machines. Thus the quality of education leaves much to be desired. Hopefully NIST experiment will lead to a decent education center. The campus is beautiful with tremendous greenery and is very tastefully kept. It has all kinds of beautiful flowering and fruiting trees on the campus, an aquarium and some emus.

## [HOME](#)

February 2012

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Sharp question session!



Sunrise on Gopalpur beach



Dangerous walk on the ledge



Gopalpur lighthouse