

**Vipul Singh**

**Controlling the River: Embankments, *Diara* Land, and Social Disparity in the Mid-Gangetic Basin (1800s to 2000s)**

The historiography of controlling the rivers in the mid-Gangetic basin is usually confined to the story of ecological impact, leaving the impact on society unexplored. My project is based on the conjecture that large colonial constructions built to control the river, such as embankments, had more than just ecological ramifications. Rather they should be treated as an interconnected experience that resulted in mixed social outcomes.

Mainly based on archival sources, my project is also an empirical study of the mid-Gangetic basin. It will showcase the lengthy embankments built during colonial rule in the nineteenth century to control flooding, which was done at the cost of the traditional water harvesting systems and embankments. The construction of a vast number of roads, railway lines, and bridges obstructed the full and natural flow of the rivers in the basin. My presumption is that colonial rule sought to organize the system of land revenue through these flood control measures. These constructions led to severe drainage congestion and obstructed the natural meandering of the massive Ganges. They transformed the region from flood dependent to flood vulnerable, majorly affecting life in the *diara* land. Perhaps the social disparities widened as a result of the colonial constructions.

My narrative originates from the passage of the British Embankment Act, 1855, which empowered engineers to embank the mighty Ganges and other rivers in the mid-Gangetic basin. For my project, I will also use judgments from local courts on disputes related to water: *Fort William-India House Correspondence*, Francis Buchanan's survey of Patna and Purnea districts, and *O'Malley's Report* of 1924. Through my intended research, I believe I can contribute to environmental history, particularly to the study of the transformation of landscapes and its consequent impact on society.