Commemorating and remembering 1857: the revolt in Delhi and its afterlife

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Abstract

This study examines the physical impact of the 1857 revolt against British rule in India, in one of the most crucial arenas of resistance – the Delhi region of north India. This was a consequence, on the one hand, of the destruction, demolition and confiscation that took place in the city and also in some of Delhi’s villages, during and in the aftermath of the revolt. On the other hand, equally transforming was the British commemoration of their victory, which resulted in the construction of a memorialized landscape by them, around the graves of dead soldiers and the scenes of military action. At the same time, part of what was destroyed and constructed in those tumultuous years had a rich afterlife, which saw an elaboration and reshaping of the landscape of remembrance, both by the ‘victorious’ and also by the ‘conquered’.

Keywords

India; Delhi; 1857 Revolt; warfare; commemoration.

Introduction

Delhi, the focus of the treason and revolt which for four months have harassed Hindustan, and the stronghold in which the mutinous army of Bengal has sought to concentrate its power, has been wrested from the rebels. 

(Canning 1857a)

In the Indian summer of 1857, a sepoy mutiny broke out in Meerut (some 50 kilometres north-east of Delhi), which was the headquarters of a division of the Bengal army. In less than a day, by the early hours of the morning of 11 May, the Meerut mutineers, crossing the bridge of boats on the Yamuna river, reached Delhi. The garrison there, almost immediately, revolted, many British residents were massacred and Bahadur Shah II, the Mughal king who resided in Delhi, accepted the nominal leadership of the rebellion. This acted as a catalyst for other revolts and, in the following days and months, there were outbreaks in stations across north and central India. As it spread, the army revolt was
transformed into a popular uprising as peasants, local notables and urban groups, cutting across castes and creeds, joined together to fight firangia (foreigner) rule. In the intensely fought military campaigns, however, superior tactics and organization eventually triumphed. British authority was re-established with ruthless force by the end of 1858, in Delhi as early as September 1857. As a consequence of the rebellion, the East India Company was abolished and India came to be directly administered by the British Crown.

Speculations about whether the mutiny was triggered by the fear of religious pollution from the animal grease on the cartridges of the new Enfield rifle, speculations concerning the social and economic reasons for the civil rebellion, and also the diametrically different perspectives on how this major moment of dislocation ought to be characterized, has generated a vast and impressive literature (for an annotated bibliography of such writings, see Jain 1998). The intention of this essay, though, is more limited. Its focus is on the physical impact of the revolt in the city of Delhi. This has been studied through a field survey of what are generally described as 'mutiny' sites and monuments in north Delhi, along with the archival sources, especially those files of the Archaeological Survey of India and the office of the Deputy Commissioner of Delhi that deal with monuments and their status in the aftermath of the revolt.

While the historic remains of several Delhiis lie scattered across the long narrow strip of country running along the right bank of the Yamuna river, the geographical nucleus of the 1857 events was much smaller. It was largely concentrated in and around Shahjahanabad, the roughly 6400 acres enclosed by a wall and built as the Mughal capital by Emperor Shah Jahan in the seventeenth century, and that section of the rocky eminence of the Aravallis, known as the northern Ridge, where the British cantonments were located. The revolt here and the city's defence by the rebels did not last long, a little more than four months. Yet, this was a crucial area of resistance in more ways than one. That practically all other uprisings followed the liberation of Delhi suggests that the expulsion of the British from the city was understood as signalling the breakdown of their authority. From the British perspective as well, the recovery of Delhi was thought to be crucial because they believed that if they conquered it without loss of time 'the rest of India might be saved' (Sen 1957: 77). Above all, the revolt was a major watershed in terms of urban morphology and transformed the city's terrain. This was the result, on the one hand, of the destruction of what each perceived to be the political stronghold of the 'other' and, in the aftermath of the British conquest, of the construction of a remembered past around sites where the rebellion was fought.

There was, however, a qualitative difference in the manner in which the revolt was memorialized. While the British commemoration of their victory was deliberate, creating as it were, a palpable 'landscape of heroism and conquest' that can be archaeologically located, hardly any physical traces of the resistance offered by Delhi's residents exist. A populace that has been brutally suppressed cannot be expected either to commemorate sites of resistance or to set up memorials. At the same time, much of what was destroyed and constructed in the aftermath of the revolt also had an afterlife. There were shifts in monument usage, architectural alterations and epigraphic additions, which in turn are connected with attitudinal changes within the British Raj and subcontinental contestations. It is this which allows us to view the memorialized arena as being an ensemble both of its construction chronology and of its reception history. This is important for other
reasons as well. For instance, it is primarily through the contestation of the landscape of revolt that the Indian state's remembrance can be archaeologically recovered. A more positive invocation of the Delhi rebels and their resistance, however, has not taken place, a 'monumental' amnesia which demands scrutiny, since various other commemorative monuments have sprung up in the city. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is as much to discuss those aspects of social memory that came to be archaeologically inscribed and those which have remained unacknowledged.

**Destruction and demolition in Delhi**

For more than half a century before the revolt, from 1803 onwards, while the administration of Delhi was in the name of the Mughal monarch who resided there, his jurisdiction remained limited to his palace – the Lal Qil'ah or Red Fort. The British had become the masters of Delhi – administering justice, collecting revenue, repairing its fortifications, improving the city's sanitary arrangements, and maintaining peace and order (Gupta 1981: 4–20; also see Frykenberg 1993). So, when the revolt broke out in 1857, the rebels squarely targeted such symbols of British authority: the pattern of killings, loot, and plunder suggests this.

'Property owned, used or lived in by the 'farangi' (Mukherjee 2001: 71) was attacked and looted – the Delhi Bank in the Chandni Chowk, houses of Europeans in localities like Daryaganj and the Kashmir bazaar. Metcalfe House where Theophilus Metcalfe, the Joint Magistrate, lived, and the British army cantonments were some of them. Bulwarks of British power were also taken over: the treasury which was plundered and its contents surrendered to the King, the jail whose prisoners were all released, and the Main Guard which was captured by mutinous soldiers (Haq 1968: 119). Controlling the Main Guard was important because it stood adjacent to the Kashmiri gate, which was the most important exit point connecting the walled city and the Ridge where the cantonments were located. The rebels attempted to seize the contents of the powder magazines as well, but in this they were only partially successful (Haq 1968: 123). While the walls of the smaller one inside the city, known as the Expedition magazine (with fifty barrels of powder), were being sealed, it was blown up by the English staff. On the other hand, the main powder magazine, containing more than 1,000 barrels of powder, which was situated outside the city walls, on the bank of the Yamuna river, was successfully captured.

Church property too was attacked, fuelled by the belief that the British were bent on destroying Hinduism and Islam through the propagation of Christianity. The most visible symbol of this was the first church built in 1837 in Delhi, that of St James. Although the building was not seriously damaged, it was 'plundered by a wild and screaming mob that bore away all its contents down to the chairs and stools and hassocks and rang the bells in mockery before cutting them loose so that they fell through the tower to the floor' (Hibbert 1978: 99). The cross and the gilded ball which adorned the top of the dome of the church were repeatedly fired at 'in the hope that by their fall might be ensured the expulsion of the English' (Hearn 1966: 5). A few tombs in the church complex were also vandalised, including a handsome one which Colonel James Skinner in 1835 had himself had erected over the remains of William Fraser, formerly Major of Skinner's horse and a resident of the
city. As for the Baptist Mission of Delhi, it was totally destroyed, and two of its British ministers were killed, as was the first ‘leading’ Indian resident of the city who had been converted by the mission, Dr Chamam Lal (Gazetteer of the Delhi District 1884: 58).

Details about this violence can be multiplied not merely from Delhi but from those areas where it was replicated, in the Meerut cantonment before Delhi (Palmer 1966: 89ff) and, afterwards, in various stations in Awadh (Mukherjee 2001: 71ff). What I want to underline, however, is simply this: instead of labelling it as mindless mob fury, as several commentators have done, it is possible to detect a ‘method’ in the ‘madness’ that accompanied the revolt. As the definitive work on the revolt in Awadh puts it, ‘the sepoys saw in the Raj an entity and structure that was intervening in their way of life and they frontally assaulted and destroyed the proximate symbols of that structure’ (Mukherjee 2001: 71).

If the attacks on and the capture of buildings that symbolized the British presence in Delhi are to be understood as a means by which the rebels publicly underlined their victory, what was the ‘purpose’ in the orgy of violence unleashed by the British troops as they captured the city?

This happened in September 1857 when four military columns simultaneously attacked the city. All through the siege of Delhi, the British soldiers on the Ridge, which they had recaptured in June, had kept their morale high by dreaming of the moment when they would attack and loot “a nice diamond or two” from the “rich old niggers” (Gupta 1981: 21). Naturally, when the city was stormed, there was widespread plunder and destruction, especially since three days of unrestricted loot were ‘allowed’ to the Army (Haq 1968: 232). After three days, plundering assumed a different shape: the property of Delhi residents came to be legally treated as prize and official digging tickets were given to specially appointed Prize Agents. Armed with these and with ‘guides, coollies, pickaxes, shovels, tape-measures, crowbars, and iron sounding-rods, officers, civilians and their wives went out on treasure-hunts all over the city’ (Hibbert 1978: 320). This official search for and appropriation of private property ended only in December 1857.

Whether the plundering was officially sanctioned or indiscriminately done, the whole city came to be treated as legitimate spoil. Following the example of medieval invaders who had marked their victory over the Mughals by carrying off treasure from their palace, British soldiers plundered whatever they could find in the Red Fort – portable artefacts, ranging from the jewels, weapons and the clothes of royal family to in situ marble slabs and inlay work. While the copper gilt domes of the Hall of Special Audience (Diwan-i-Khas), the Musamman Burj and the Pearl Mosque (Moti Masjid) were sold by auction (Hearn 1906: 14), property worth Rs 10,000 was dug out of the Srimati temple by the Prize Agents (Sen 1957: 114). Elsewhere in the city too, soldiers and officers were equally thorough. One of them, Captain Griffiths, recounted:

We entered several of the large houses belonging to the wealthiest class of natives and found every one in the same condition, turned inside out, their ornaments torn to pieces, costly articles, too heavy to remove, battered into fragments. . . . To my certain knowledge many soldiers of the English regiments got possession of jewellery and gold ornaments taken from the bodies of the slain city inhabitants and I was shown by men of my regiment strings of pearls and gold mohars which had fallen into their hands.

(cited in Hibbert 1978: 319)
Much of this treasure became the property of those who had discovered it, mementos of their victory over the 'enemy'. This was especially common among those who had become fugitives after the revolt in Delhi. The family of George Wagentreiber, who worked at the Delhi Gazette, for instance, had escaped from their house outside the city walls in May 1857 and had fled to Karnal. But they soon returned, with Wagentreiber being appointed as one of the agents of the 'Delhi Prize'. Eventually their house outside Delhi was rebuilt, filled, as one of them recounted, 'from floor to ceiling with all the wonderful things collected in those eventful days' (cited in Hibbert 1978: 320). The Delhi loot also reached England, since a large number of British non-commissioned officers and soldiers bought their discharge following the end of the revolt. Just as in the early part of the nineteenth century, 'colony‐returned' British gentlemen carried back historic artefacts as mementos of their Indian experience, now 'mutiny' veterans brought home their trophies of conquest. Several such trophies found their way into British museums. Among the most famous of these were the rare *pietra dura* panels that formed the backdrop to the throne of the emperor in the Hall of General Audience (Diwan'i Am) in the Red Fort (Plate 1). The pitted panels included the top central one, an Italian product, which depicted Orpheus playing his lute and wild animals seated before him. These had been taken away by Captain John Jones in 1857 and were bought by the British government for 500 pounds.

*Plate 1* The *pietra dura* panels of the Hall of General Audience (Diwan'i Am), looted by Captain Jones in 1857 and restored in 1903. Photograph: Archaeological Survey of India, Delhi Album (Vols 1 and 2, 1914-15).
when Jones returned to England. They soon became part of the collection of Indian artefacts in the Kensington Museum (now known as the Victoria & Albert Museum).

The sack of Delhi was one aspect of the impact that this violent confrontation had on the material culture of the city. Its intentional 'desacralization' (Cohn 1987: 646) was the other aspect, as the original functions and layouts of some of the most important buildings and city quarters were deliberately altered. The Red Fort, the symbol of the city's resistance, was brutally metamorphosed. Major clearances were made in its interior, the object of which was to open out wholesome space for occupation of the Fort by European Barracks and the other regiments of the garrison (Secretary Punjab 1863). Many buildings of minor value, which could not be profitably used or were deemed as unworthy of being preserved, were demolished. The grounds were also levelled and the debris from these clearances was used to form the glacis around the Fort walls. Barracks were constructed in large parts of the Fort while historic buildings were converted to suit the functions of the garrison there. Officers were quartered in the drum house (Naqar Khana), the Zafar Mahal was used as a bath for soldiers while wooden doors and iron gratings were put up in the Hall of General Audience (Diwan's Am). Cookhouses, privies, and urinals were built in various parts of the historic complex, near the Zafar Mahal, in the Hayat Baksh garden itself and also west of the Sawan and Bhadon pavilions (Marshall 1902).

The changes outside the Fort were even more dramatic and involved the clearance of buildings within a 450-yard limit from its walls. A vivid visual evocation of the surgical demolition that this involved can be had by comparing the photographs taken by Felice Beato in 1858, before the clearances, with how it presently appears (see Masselos and Gupta 2000: 20ff.). As those photographs show, an unfortunate casualty was the seventeenth-century Akbarabad mosque, built by and named after one of Emperor Shah Jahan's wives. Historic markets such as the Urdu bazaar and the Khas bazaar, through which the emperor had proceeded in state to the Jama Masjid on feast days, and also squares like the one named after S'a-ad-ullah Khan, the prime minister of Shah Jahan, were razed. This was apparently done for military reasons, to remove what was described as 'dangerous cover' but, as Gupta caustically observes, 'what the Government decided was necessary for its security led to some of the loveliest buildings of the city being destroyed'. Fortunately, a small elegant mosque, the Suneeri Masjid, near the Delhi Gate of the palace, escaped demolition, apparently because it offered very little 'cover' (Deputy Commissioner 1871). What also survived was the Dariba, a locality which fell within the 500 hundred yards radius from which buildings had to be cleared. It was retained because it was thought to be impolitic to alienate its Hindu merchants and shopkeepers, who had petitioned Governor General Canning (Secretary 1860). In order to prevent the demolition of the Dariba, the radius of clearance around the fort was reduced to 450 yards.

Intentional desacralization was writ large over the city mosques as well. Although Suneeri Masjid had not been demolished, it was confiscated by the British government because it formed part of the precincts of the royal buildings. Within a short distance from the Fort stood the Jama Masjid, the largest congregational mosque of Delhi. Officially closed down for public worship, for a short while it was placed at the disposal of Sikh soldiers – to be used as barracks by them. South of the Fort, the Zinat-ul-Masjid was
confiscated by the military authorities (Plate 2). One of the most impressive mosques in the
city, it was converted into a bakery for troops by the Commissariat Department. Unsightly
additions were subsequently made to it so that it could also be partly used as a dwelling
house (Officer 1890). Another kind of desecration took place at the Fatehpuri mosque
which lay towards the western end of Chandni Chowk. The mosque was confiscated and its
shops and quadrangle were sold, in public auction, to Chunna Mal, one of the richest Hindu
bankers of the city. The rooms opening into its quadrangle, meant for students of religious
books, were converted into shops by the new proprietor (Deputy Commissioner 1877). The
Sadruddin mosque in the Sabzi mandi (vegetable market) area was similarly treated. This
masjid and the garden where it stood belonged to Maulvi Sadruddin Khan but were sold,

*Plate 2: Zinat ul Masjid in 1858. Photograph: Archaeological Survey of India, Delhi Album (Vol. 5,
1932–7).*
after the revolt, as confiscated property, to one Jauhari Mal. It was later occupied as a dwelling house by a 'European' (Deputy Commissioner 1877).

Retribution was not confined to the walled city. As a penal measure, large numbers of plots of agricultural land from as many as thirty-three villages of the Delhi district were confiscated: Alipur, Chandrawal, Kotla Mubarakpur, Mehrauli, Indraprastra, Palam, Raisina, and Wazirabad are some of them (Gupta 1981: 31). While the cause of confiscation of the land of Chandrawal was that the village had plundered the cantonments, the land of Alipur village was confiscated because its proprietors had 'plundered the high road during the war' (Temple 1858). The confiscated rural property was large – in Chandrawal, two-thirds of the land of the village was confiscated, while at Wazirpur and Alipur, more than half the village lands were taken away. Such measures transformed Delhi's social geography, it was alleged that a great deal of this land was given as reward for 'loyal service' or was bought by persons who were not the residents of the villages.

When this campaign of confiscation and demolition was finally over, what remained was a battered and mutilated city. The victorious British forces had virtually treated the entire population as culpable of treason and had ensured that their punishment left a lasting physical impact. There was very little that a conquered populace could do except remember and lament, frequently in ways that cannot be easily recognized from material cultural evidence. A poignant reminder of this comes from the experience of a missionary who, on one occasion, instructed his class of catechists to write an essay on the Mutiny, in response to which every youth submitted a sheet of blank paper. 'It was a silent, unanimous and unapologetic refusal to perform the task' (Thompson 1926: 120). While this strongly invokes the bitter memory of the revolt and substantiates Thompson's observation that 'at the back of the mind of many an Indian the mutiny lingers as he talks with an Englishman – an unavenged and unappeased ghost' (1926: 30), social remembrance in such situations rarely leaves behind material traces.

Such remembrance does, however, occasionally attach itself to the landscape of events. And so, since the revolt, the stone vaulted gateway which stands south of the walled city of Delhi, opposite Firoz Shah Kotla, came to be associated with bloodshed and murder. Originally called the Kabuli Darwaza (Kabul gateway), its popular name after the 1857 events is Khuni Darwaza (bloody gateway). This is derived from the fact that King Bahadur Shah's sons were first stripped and then killed there by Captain Hodson (Plate 3) (Nanda et al. 1999, 1: 182). This sobriquet, incidentally, imitated the name of the other gateway called Khuni Darwaza which stood near the Dariba in Chandni Chowk. That too had been so named because it was the site of a ferocious massacre when the city's inhabitants had been killed in large numbers by Nadir Shah, the eighteenth-century Persian invader (Hasan 1916, 1: 123–4). More than anything else, this suggests that Delhi's residents viewed the British celebration of their conquest of the city as something which replicated the bloodshed and plunder that followed in the wake of medieval conquersors.

Memorializing the revolt

If the 1857 destruction and demolition physically altered Delhi, the construction by the victors of sites of remembrance and commemoration on the 'mutiny' landscape – from the
Plate 3 Painting which depicts Captain Hodson’s slaying of the Mughal princes. Photograph: Swatantrata Sangram Sangrahalya.

graves of the dead to memorials around episodes of the revolt – was equally transfiguring. One does not have to be a specialist in symbolism to realize that some of these sites can be read as ideological statements, where the monuments and epigraphs inscribed on them, contributed to the construction of one of the archetypal myths of British India, that of sacrifice and bravery ‘selflessly’ displayed for a larger cause. At least, that is how the monuments were packaged by guidebooks for the English travellers who visited Delhi. For example, Gordon Risley Hearn’s The Seven Cities of Delhi devoted its first chapter to an itinerary for travellers in and around the city’s ‘mutiny’ sites so that they could visualize ‘the story of this strenuous struggle by which India was saved’ (1906:20).

No visible agenda, though, can be discerned in the spatial distribution of the mutiny dead. A separate military cemetery for the British army men who died in the revolt was not set up; their graves are dispersed over a large area. A few of them were buried near the scenes of military action where they were killed, such as Captain G. C. M. Barnett and Lieutenant Alexander William Murray, who both died on 14 September. While Barnett was buried alone, south of the Ridge, Murray was interred near the Pir Ghaib observatory on the Ridge. This was not always so. Colonel C. Chester, for instance, who was killed by the first discharge of the rebel guns at the battle of Badli-ki-Sarai, was buried in the Military Cemetery near the British cantonments, several miles south of the battle arena. The resting place of the officers who were murdered at the Main Guard of Kashmiri Gate was also at some distance from where they had been killed. This is because their bodies were sent by the rebels to the Flagstaff Tower on the Ridge where they remained on a cart
till 8 June, when the British forces who reoccupied the Ridge on that day found them. They were accorded a multiple burial near where their bodies were found.

Then there were the chief commanding officers who had died during those fateful four months. One of them, Major General Sir Henry Barnard, was buried in the Military Cemetery, while the British ‘hero’ of the Delhi assault, Brigadier-General John Nicholson, was consigned to the Kashmir gate cemetery. His grave was covered with a large marble slab, which had apparently been taken (or purloined?) from the defeated king’s palace (Plate 4). Nicholson was memorialized in other ways as well. Possibly he was the only British officer whose statue was put up in Delhi – across the road from where he was buried, in what came to be called the Nicholson gardens. Not far from this, near Kabul gate, a tablet was also placed behind the battlements which identified this as the place where Nicholson was mortally wounded. The cemetery where he was buried, however, was indifferently provided for. A few years after the revolt, D. P. Williams, Chaplain of Delhi, was shocked to find that many of the graves in the cemetery, especially those of the epidemic victims of 1856, had been disturbed and ‘the remains of the dead dragged out by jackals’ (Williams 1863). Fortunately for his admirers, Nicholson’s mortal remains were untouched because of the solid tombstone that sealed them.

Rather than the distribution of graves, it is the epitaphs on gravestones and memorial tablets that allow us to visualize how the army wanted their dead to be remembered. The
epitaphs generally mention the ranks of the soldiers, the contexts in which they died and the persons who inscribed the messages. The gravestone of Nicholson not only mentioned his age (35) and the day he died (23 September) but also that he had led the assault on Delhi and had been mortally wounded 'in the hour of victory'. Details of death, however, were sometimes omitted when the commanding officer had died in less glorious circumstances. General Henry Barnard, for instance, was a Crimean veteran but was new to India and had collapsed in Delhi on 5 July, after a short attack of cholera. Death through disease must have been an embarrassing circumstance to record on the gravestone of the officer who commanded the Delhi force. The inscription on his grave, therefore, mentioned only that he died 'when in chief command of the troops besieging Delhi' (Fanshawe 1902: 80).

The brevity of the epitaphs on the graves of Barnard and Nicholson, however, contrasts sharply with several other memorial inscriptions. An example of an elaborate message on stone, for the dead soldiers of the 2nd European Bengal Fusiliers, comes from the church of St James, Set up by the regiment. It mentions the names of almost two hundred officers and men who 'in glorious sacrifice to their country' lost their lives 'in the defence of the honor of their beloved Queen and country in avenging their murdered countrymen and women, in crushing a mutiny unrivalled for its atrocities and in the final assault and capture of the city of Delhi'. The manner in which such inscriptions invoke British patriotism and sacrifice is strongly reminiscent of the language and the sentiments of a great deal of 'mutiny' literature that was woven around similar tales of 'selfless bravery' in the face of 'native atrocities' (Singh 1973).

There are a few tablets that refer to the familial associations of dead soldiers but, generally speaking, such information is absent from the army graves. How their surviving kin viewed this absence, as also the manner of their burial at what became, for them, sites of remembrance, remains unknown. But, at least at one location, a widow decided to commemorate her husband separately. He was C. A. Edwards who had been interred in the multiple grave near Flagstaff Tower by his 'brother officers'. Apart from setting out the circumstances in which they had died, the army memorial stone remembered them as army men who belonged to the 54th Regiment of the Bengal Native Infantry. Edwards' widow, though, wanted her husband to be remembered in other ways. On the epitaph which she had separately inscribed within the same enclosure, he is memorialized not merely as a soldier ('ever ready when Duty called him'), but as a son (the eldest of R. V. Edwards of Clifton, Bristol), also as a man of 'Christian virtues' and, most poignantly, as an affectionate husband. As she put it, 'in the endearing character of Husband, his fond care and affection with the memory of many sterling qualities will ever be sacredly cherished by her who must ever mourn his sad and untimely end. . . . This Tomb is erected by his bereaved and sorrowing widow' (for the full inscription, see Irving 1910: 16).

Apart from the graves, what produced a coherent archaeological arena of remembrance was the perpetuation of the memory of incidents that were crucial, from the British perspective, in the trajectory of events that unfolded between May and September 1857. Such commemoration mainly, though not exclusively, attached itself to the sites where the events had unfolded. If we proceed chronologically, the most heroic act (for the British) of 11 May, when the revolt began in Delhi, was the deliberate blowing up of the Expense magazine, south of Kashmiri gate. Two gates of the magazine, which is practically
all that remained of it, became a memorial monument and on them was inscribed the memory of the actions of the 'nine resolute Englishmen' who fired it. Five of them perished in the ensuing explosion, which, the tablet informs us 'at the same time destroyed many of the enemy'. Then, there were the events of early June when the British regained the Ridge and returned to the Delhi cantonments after winning a crucial battle at Badli-ki-Sarai. The 3m-high red sandstone column at Azadpur, in the vicinity of the battle site, commemorated that victory. Bearing the ornamental logo of the Gordon Highlanders, this was a memorial to the members of its 79th Regiment who were killed in that battle.

The most comprehensive memorialization, though, was with reference to the assault on the city in September 1857. For one thing, inscriptions were fixed on the half a dozen or so siege batteries that had been used in the attack and were located across the alignment of the Ridge, from Qudsia Gardens near the river where the Siege Mortar Battery stood, to the Sammy House Battery, south-east of Bari Hindo Rao. The legends – much like museum labels – identified, in each case, the commanding officers, the nature of armaments, and the specific action for which these were used, whether it was to 'silence' the Kashmir bastion or to 'breach' the curtain of the Water bastion of the rebels. In the context of September 1857, even death in unsuccessful military action was commemorated. For instance, a memorial was set up near the grave of Captain Barnet, which marked the losses that the 1st Bengal Fusiliers suffered near this spot. The soldiers who had died formed part of the 4th column that was vigorously rebuffed by the rebel army, although the epitaph remembers only their bravery, not the failed assault: 'Familiar with the aspect of Death which they had confronted in many battles from which they had always emerged victorious, they met his last inevitable call here with intrepid duty, falling on the 14th September 1857 in the faithful discharge of their duty' (Fanshawe 1902: 52).

In fact, as one surveys the 'mutiny' landscape, the provocative manner in which the army commemorated scenes of action becomes palpable, as does the absence of this in relation to those incidents in which people were killed through massacre and mob violence. There were, for instance, no state memorials for the 'civilians' – mainly women and children – who were killed in front of the Naqbar Khana in the Red Fort nor for the others who were put to death by the rebels in different parts of the city. Subsequently, it was at the initiative of the Baptist Mission that funds were collected to build a church in the memory of the English and Indian Christians who lost their lives on the outbreak of the revolt. Known as the St Stephen's Memorial Church, it was first opened for service on 11 May 1867, the tenth anniversary of the 1857 rebellion (Gazetteer of the Delhi District 1884: 63).

Apart from the creation of a new church, the memory of various 'civilian' victims was also immortalized in the church where many of them must have worshipped, that of St James. Social remembrance at St James took the form of memorial stones, set up by the families and friends of the dead. Simon Fraser, the murdered Commissioner of Delhi was memorialized here, by an unnamed 'old friend', as was T.W. Collins, deputy collector of Delhi and members of his family, ranging from his wife and children to his mother-in-law and his brothers-in-law. The memorial tablet for this large kin group was set up by the 'surviving orphans of T.W. Collins'. A tablet was also erected in the memory of Doctor Chaman Lal who had been killed on the first day of the revolt in Delhi. While the identity of those who set up a memorial for him remains unmentioned, the language of the
inscription clearly suggests that it must have been a ‘European’ church person. Chaman Lall’s name appears in its anglicized form – as Chimmin Lall – while he is described as a ‘Native Christian’ who converted from Hinduism in 1852 and ‘fell a martyr to his faith on the day of the Massacre of Christians in Delhi’. At the same time, to ensure that ‘natives’ could also read the text, it was inscribed in both English and Urdu. Finally, inside the church was interred part of the tomb of the late William Fraser that had been desecrated by the rebels in May 1857 (see p. 37 above). This is a beautiful stone slab, inlaid with green and yellow stones in the design of a tree. In memory of the friendship of Fraser and James Skinner, this was set in the chancel floor, west of Skinner’s own grave and engraved with an inscription that sets forth the reasons as to why the slab had been re-enshrined inside the church.

A relevant aspect, worth emphasizing, is that the commemoration of particular incidents and events was not simultaneous but staggered, over fifty years or so. An instance in point is the blowing open of Kashmiri gate in September 1857, which was indispensable to the success of the British assault on Delhi, since it had allowed direct passage into the walled city (Plate 5). About a dozen soldiers were either mortally wounded or were killed in clearing it. This, in fact, had drawn special mention, in November 1857, from Governor General Canning, who offered a tribute ‘of admiration and thanks to the brave soldiers

who, under Lieutenants Home and Salkeld, accomplished the desperate task' (Canning 1857b). But it was after almost two decades (in 1876) that a stone tablet came to be fixed between the arched openings of the gate. This was done by the then Commander in Chief in India, General Lord Napier of Magdala. The tablet mentioned the details of the attack as also the names of the soldiers, English and Indian, who had spearheaded it.

Why this commemorative tablet was set up in 1876 is not clear. It may have been fixed when the Prince of Wales visited Delhi in January 1876, although it is likely that this was part of the preparations for the Imperial Assemblage which was held in the city in 1877, to celebrate the assumption of the title of Empress of India by Queen Victoria. The Imperial assemblage will be discussed in the next section, but what may be mentioned here is that Napier’s tribute appears to be an incomplete citation. As Fanshawe (1902: 89) later pointed out, the names of the two ‘native’ men who had been specially mentioned in the army report for their ‘determined bravery and coolness’ – Havaldar Ram Taroy and Sepyol Sahib Singh – do not appear on it.

H. C. Fanshawe was the deputy commissioner of the area, one who was deeply interested in Delhi’s history and monuments, and he chanced upon this error because he was writing a book on the city. In the course of his research, he also noted that the site of No IV Siege Mortar battery had been left uncommemorated. By bearings and offsets from the other batteries and sites marked on the plans of 1857, he determined that this must have stood about a hundred yards inside Qudsia Gardens. A miniature battery was set up there in 1900 and the message that he had inscribed on it faithfully imitated the cryptic inscriptions on the tablets of the other batteries. It read:

*Left Attack – Lieut. W.A. GREATHED [Directing Engineer, Bengal Engineers, NO IV BATTERY Gunnery, 10 mortars Captain & Brevet Major Tombs, Royal Artillery, Commanding To shell Kashmir Gate & Kashmir & Water Bastions*

The other memorial which was set up decades after the revolt, although not in the vicinity of the ‘original theatre of action’, was the Telegraph memorial. On 11 May 1857, the message sent from the Telegraph Office in Delhi had forewarned other British stations about the unfolding revolt. This office was originally situated behind Flagstaff House on the Ridge, while the granite obelisk memorial was erected by members of the Telegraph Department in the walled city – in front of the new Telegraph office. Set up on 19 April 1902, it was elaborately inscribed on the front and back. The front epigraph is fairly novel in the sense that it tells us about the staff composition of the office in 1857, remembers the ‘loyal and devoted services’ of the two young signallers who telegraphed information about what was happening in Delhi and gives details about their subsequent careers. It also takes full credit for the British victory in 1857, ending with the words of Sir Robert Montgomery that ‘The Electric Telegraph has saved India!’ Although the British army would have disagreed with Montgomery’s assessment, the biographical details certainly helped to correct the colourful mythology that had been created around this event, at least in one account. Apparently, Cooper’s *Handbook for Delhi*, written in 1863 (see Fanshawe 1902: 108) had mentioned that, on 11 May 1857, the signaller at Delhi was killed with his hand still upon the telegraph instrument, whereas, as the Telegraph memorial tells
us, neither of them died in such dramatic circumstances. While one of them, J. W. Pilkinson, had died a decade after the revolt, in 1867, the other signaller, W. Brendish, had retired from service only in 1896.

But why was the memorial set up only in 1902? As in the case of the Kashmiri gate tablet, we shall, perhaps, never know, although one suspects that it may have to do with the enthusiasm of Fanshawe, who believed that the British government in India had done too little to hallow the memories of its dead servants who 'fell before Delhi, upholding the cause of their country' (Fanshawe 1902: 80). After all, it was Fanshawe who had recommended that a memorial cross be set up in the Military Cemetery where many mutiny veterans, including Henry Barnard, were buried.

Finally, a word about the official Mutiny Memorial of Delhi that was erected in 1863. Constructed on the site of the artillery unit known as Taylor's battery, which bore the brunt of rebel fire, there is much about the character of this tapering red sandstone monument that can be discussed (Plate 6). There is, for instance, its indifferent Gothic design, which resembles 'a telescope badly drawn out' (Fanshawe 1902: 85). The arched

Plate 6 Mutiny Memorial on the northern Ridge. Photograph: author.
marble-backed recesses, inset on all sides of the octagonal tower, are also poorly executed, occasionally created out of three separate pieces of stone. What is most striking, though, is that these recesses are prolifically inscribed and appear to comprehensively set out the narrative of the Delhi revolt. There is a detailed list of regiments that were present, actions that were fought at or near Delhi by the Delhi Field Force, a chronology about the siege ranging from the arming of batteries to the capture of the palace, and a carefully compiled ‘return of casualties’ suffered by the army. There are separate columns that record the number of soldiers killed, wounded and missing and also the corps to which they belonged.

However, as we examine the memorial narrative more carefully, it becomes evident that historical details are selectively inscribed. There is no mention at all of British army actions in Delhi on 11 May, or in the days that followed, perhaps because they failed to suppress the revolt. Nor are the British soldiers who died in those early days thought worthy of commemoration. In a sense, its Hindustani name, Fatehpur (‘Victory Fort’) is an appropriate one, because its narrative of commemoration concerns itself exclusively with British successes against rebel forces (Hasan 1976, II: 282). What also stands out in the Mutiny Memorial’s encapsulated history are military and race distinctions. Army hierarchy is reflected in the manner in which the casualties are presented, in three categories – officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers. Racial difference is inscribed into each of these categories; the casualties are subdivided into ‘European’ and ‘Native’. Generally speaking, on memorial monuments, the names of soldiers who died are listed, but in this case, of the 1,082 army men who perished, only forty-seven are specifically mentioned. Even in death, Englishmen were privileged over their racial ‘others’. The inscribed names are ‘European’, mainly those of dead officers. The fourteen ‘native’ officers who perished remain anonymous, reduced to a mere statistical detail in the monument’s inventory of casualties.

The afterlife of 1857 in Delhi

The British consolidation of their victory over the Delhi rebels in 1857 had a very specific material impact on the city, as did the various memorials that sprang up across its terrain. In the decades that followed, this memorialized landscape continued to be confirmed and elaborated by the victors, as has been touched upon in the previous section. But, simultaneously, there were also policy shifts that materially changed and occasionally inverted aspects of the revolt’s brutal aftermath.

This simultaneous confirmation and inversion clearly stands out in the setting of the Imperial Assemblage that was held twenty years after the revolt. In 1877, with the end of the Company’s rule, the British Crown had become the centre of authority and, as conditions in India stabilized, this relationship was further cemented by the addition of a new title by Queen Victoria in 1876 – that of the Empress of India. Some months later, a grand gathering of the British rulers, Indian princes, nobles, ‘native’ gentlemen, etc., was organized to celebrate this addition. Even though Calcutta was the nerve centre of British India, it was decided by the planners that this assemblage should be held in Delhi because the city represented the erstwhile Mughal capital. By placing the Queen’s authority upon
the old throne of the Mughals, it was hoped that the supreme power that she enjoyed over her Indian subjects would be symbolically reiterated within the parameters of Indian tradition (Cohn 1987: 656; also see Trevithick 1990).

Within Delhi, a city of tents and pavilions for the accommodation of the various attending dignitaries was set up, and, significantly enough, as the official history of the Imperial Assemblage tells us:

the English camps mostly stood on the memorable site which was occupied by the British army in 1857. On one side was the Ridge where British cannon was planted against the doomed city. On the other side was the Nujurgarh Canal, which formed the rear of the besieging force. It was difficult to gaze upon the different camps without recalling some of the scenes in that famous siege.

(Wheeler 1982 [1877]: 47)

The procession which brought the viceroy and various guests from the railway station to the camp also followed a route that circumambulated the terrain of the revolt. It lasted for three hours and proceeded from the station to Jama Masjid, turned around the mosque and entered the Chandni Chowk. It then went through the Lahore gate, moving on to the Sabzi Mandi, 'the scene of many hard fought battles during the great siege', and, finally, went up the Ridge 'so gallantly held by British troops during the height of the troubles in 1857' (Wheeler 1982 [1877]: 56).

There is little doubt that Lord Lytton’s Assemblage unambiguously refreshed, for the participants and observers, the memory of the revolt in Delhi and the bravery and ‘sacrifice’ that were involved in its suppression. At the same time, encoded in its enactment were many other messages that worked against the grain of the 1857 victory. For one thing, the assemblage was part of a policy to develop better ties between Indians, especially the ‘native’ aristocracy of the country, and the Crown. On the landscape where they had faced each other as foes, they were now meeting as ‘friends’, we are told, as shots and shells were replaced by feasting and cordiality. The occasion was also used to make a specific announcement aimed to ‘undo’ the damage that had been inflicted on Muslim sentiment in Delhi in 1857. This concerned the reopening of the Zain-ul-Masjid and the Fatehpuri mosques for public worship. In the latter case, more than a lakh (100,000) of rupees was paid as compensation to Umrao Singh, the son of Chunnal Mal, so as to enable the transfer of the shops and quadrangle to Muslims (Deputy Commissioner 1877).

This did not mean that the mosques reverted to their pre-1857 status. In fact, as in the case of the Jama Masjid (which was reopened for worship in November 1882), certain conditions were laid down under which they were to be transferred, which included making proper arrangements for them being kept in repair. Evidently, British officials saw no contradiction in making the repair of the mosques a precondition for their reopening even while, a few hundred yards from them, the British army drastically changed the character of equally historic buildings inside the Red Fort. The government also reserved the right to resume possession if the managers of the mosques failed to act upon the stipulated conditions. So, while the measures were packaged as ‘concessions’ which were aimed at mitigating the 1857 confiscation of the mosques, the reified form in which they were handed over made it amply clear to Delhi’s residents that the British Raj was the centre of all authority pertaining to them.
Twenty-five years later, a second Imperial Assemblage was organized— a Coronation Darbar to celebrate the coronation of King Edward VII as the Emperor of India. Held in Delhi (in January 1903) by the viceroy, Lord Curzon, this too saw a similar commemoration, in terrain and through rituals that consciously evoked the revolt. An amphitheatre was constructed around the site of Lord Lytton’s Darbar which had stood on the land from where the British had fought the rebels in 1857. The route of the viceregal procession, as earlier, traversed much of the ‘mutiny’ landscape. The ‘sufferings and triumphs of nearly half a century ago’ (Wheeler 1991 [1903]: 111) were further invoked by the inclusion and assignment of a prominent place in the Darbar to mutiny survivors of the British army, who had fought at Delhi and Lucknow. Of the veterans present, 387 were Indians while twenty-seven were Europeans and Eurasians and they had been invited so as to give them ‘an opportunity to revisit the scene of their former deeds of daring and to take part in the great solemnity which but for their valour might never have been held’ (Wheeler 1991 [1903]: 111).

At the same time, this occasion, like the first Imperial Assemblage, in important ways, reconstituted the 1857 legacy. For one thing, it resulted in ‘undoing’ some of the destruction wreaked by the British forces on historic structures within the walled city. In the Red Fort, structural restorations by the Archaeological Survey of India were undertaken with Darbar funds. This included repairing the inlay work on the low platform in the Diwan-i-Am, the replacement of the iron grating around it and also of the wooden balustrades between the Diwan-i-Khas and the Musamman Burj. Apart from the occasion itself, it is relevant to remember the general context in which such restorations were undertaken. Lord Curzon’s agenda regarding monuments was certainly related to his deep interest in archaeology but, equally, it was animated by the need to make imperial governance appear more enlightened. Historic buildings that had been pillaged or converted into dingy government spaces in 1857, such as those at Delhi, were an embarrassing reminder of ‘a century of British vandalism and crime’ (as Curzon put it), while dismantling signs of such colonial violence was necessary to lend credence to the construction of a beneficent imperial identity (Lahiri 2000). The programme of architectural conservation and restoration around the Red Fort which coincided with the preparations for the Darbar has to be understood from this perspective. Such measures were urgently required because two notable gatherings connected with it were to be held in the Red Fort, one of which was the State ball, the venue of which was to be the white marble hall of private audience known as the Diwan-i-Khas.

It is, however, the second gathering—the ‘Grand chapter of the two Indian Orders’—which amplifies the circumstances which were instrumental in effacing the violence of the revolt. This investiture ceremony was to be held in the Diwan-i-Am, Shah Jahan’s Hall of General audience, with the dias placed before the throne platform. This, of course, drew attention to the large gaps in the wall behind the platform, which had been created by the looting of its pietra dura panels by Captain Jones in 1857 (see p. 39 above). The Viceroy and his Council, therefore, immediately requested the return of the panels so that ‘the background of the throne should represent to assembled spectators, by a careful restoration, to its original condition, not the vandalism of an earlier generation, but the generous enlightenment of a later and more cultured age’ (Curzon and Council 1902). Although the panels reached India before the Darbar, they could not be put in place in time for the
investiture ceremony. But, shortly afterwards, they were restored and today they form the backdrop to Shah Jahan's throne.

Many other objects that had been removed from the Red Fort in 1857 also had interesting afterlives, not entirely unrelated to questions of remembrance. The trajectory of one, Bahadur Shah Zafar's 'Holy Shirt', is especially interesting. The shirt in question, with verses of the Koran written on it, was apparently one of four similar shirts which had been sent from Mecca to four Muslim powers and was said to provide a kind of immunity against trouble to the wearer. We are told that 'the old king had worn it day and night for the last few days, previous to his flight, in order to avert the coming evil' (Thompson 1909). For some unaccountable reason, he threw it off at the last moment, and it was found by the French nurse of the children of Colonel Tytler near the gate by which the royal party had fled. It then passed into the possession of the Tytlers family. The Tytlers kept the shirt in a bank vault but, until this became known, they were the victims of several robberies and more than one serious attempt on their lives. Clearly, the value of the shirt had everything to do with the properties it was supposed to be imbued with: on the one hand, its association with Mecca, on the other hand, its association with the last Mughal king who had become the symbol of Indian resistance against the British.

We next hear of the shirt during the Coronation Darbar in 1903 when the Nizam of Hyderabad made an offer of Rs 10,000 for it. A little after that offer was made, the Imam of the Jama Masjid of Delhi wanted Mrs Tytler to allow him to exhibit it in the ground in front of the mosque. He expected that thousands of pilgrims would flock to see it and that the proceeds of the entrance fees could be divided between the masjid and Mrs Tytler. The exhibition was on the verge of taking place but was vetoed at the last moment by the Commissioner of Delhi, Major Douglas. As he put it, 'he could not possibly run the risk of a riot'. According to Edith Livingston-Thompson (1909), the daughter of the late Tytlers, this interference was providential, for knowing the numerous attempts that had already been made to get the shirt back, I feel confident that this was but one more and one that in all probability would have succeeded'. Eventually, she sold it for a sum of Rs 12,000 to the Archaeological Survey in 1909. It then became part of the collection of Mughal objects in the archaeological museum of the Red Fort where it is still displayed. So, while the revolt resulted in the banishment of Bahadur Shah Zafar from Delhi, at least the shirt that he lost once again resides in the fort where he spent most of his life, ironically re-enshrined by the political successors of the very people who had looted his palace.

Finally, let us now move on to post-independence Delhi, since it is only after 1947 that Delhi's residents and the Indian ruling class have remembered and commemorated the revolt in a palpably material way. Before doing that, it is necessary to point out that, although Delhi remained the political capital of India (the imperial capital of the British had been shifted from Calcutta to Delhi in 1912), independence and the partition of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan changed its basic character in a number of ways. For one thing, there was a massive transfer of population – nearly 500,000 refugees arrived in the city while as many as 330,000 Muslims left Delhi (many of them must have had ancestors who had fought against the British in 1857).

From the perspective of the present paper, the manner is significant in which several old inhabitants of Delhi, now free citizens of an independent nation-state, almost immediately articulated demands that were based on the social memory of the revolt: A
few months after India attained independence, several Delhi villages petitioned the government to overturn the retribution that they had suffered during the revolt. Such demands, incidentally, were articulated not merely in local meetings but in the Constituent Assembly of India (Deputy Commissioner 1948). The first section of this paper had drawn attention to the manner in which the rural landscape and social geography of the Delhi region had been deliberately changed through the British policy of land confiscation (p. 42 above). The successors of several of the families that had lost their lands in such circumstances now requested their return. Such demands were made by the villages of Chowkri Mubarakkabad, Wazirpur, Khampur and Chandrawal (Deputy Commissioner 1948).

There is no ambiguity that it is the material milieu of the post-1857 scenario, where Delhi's rebels were penalized by the British for revolting against them, whose change was sought. An extract from a letter written by the General Secretary of the Congress Committee of Wazirpur to the Chief Commissioner of Delhi makes this connection. It asked the Indian government to return the lands that were taken away from us by the British Government during the Jung-i-Azadi (war of independence) i.e., in 1857 be restored to us and given back to us as early as possible by the National Government. It may be mentioned here, Sir, that now when our Mother-land (India) has achieved her freedom, the losses which we had undergone during the British Raj and were deprived of many things only because we had participated in the struggle for freedom which resulted in a Revolution of 1857, be made good to us.

(Deputy Commissioner 1948)

The British, as the victors of 1857, had confiscated their lands and now families were demanding that the Indian government should remember their sacrifice by returning their patrimony to them. Eventually, no transfers took place because the lands were legally in the possession of other proprietors. Still, this reminds us that multiple perspectives cohere around the landscape that is created through the crucible of war. What were sites of victory for the British came to be remembered by those who had peopled them as the material signifiers of their colonized status, a situation which they tried to change as soon as they attained independence.

If the rural landscape that had been redrawn in 1857 remained unchanged, the same cannot be said about other segments of the memorialized landscape. Take the case of the British graveyards, which suffered damage on many occasions. The Nicholson/Kashmiri Gate Cemetery is an example of this. During the 1947 disturbances, apparently, the cemetery and the graves there were badly damaged by refugees who were encamped in that area (High Commissioner 1963). Subsequently, extensive repairs were carried out at the expense of the Chief Commissioner of Delhi. Some years later, in March 1956, this cemetery was deliberately vandalized by a milk seller called Bhoooran/Bhawar Singh from the nearby Qudsia gardens who damaged, broke and upturned nearly 200 graves. He was sentenced that very month to over nine months of rigorous imprisonment 'for trespassing into a graveyard with the intention of hurting the feelings of the Christian community by breaking tombstones' (Staff Reporter 1926). In spite of such episodes, on the whole, the nineteenth-century form of the Nicholson Cemetery is still recognizable.
This cannot be said for many other sites. For instance, the Rajpura Military Cemetery, where Henry Barnard and many other soldiers were buried, no longer exists. This originally stood in the pre-1857 British cantonments, which, from 1933 onwards, came to house the campus of Delhi University. The cemetery continued to exist until about 1980, when, according to residents of that area, it began to witness a massive, irregular influx. This soon took a residential form and is now known as the Christian Colony. There is still a cemetery adjacent to the colony, but the graves there are all of post-1970 vintage. There is no trace at all of the nineteenth-century 'Gora Kabristan' (burial ground of the white man), since all its old graves have all been built over. The only material indicator of the original cemetery remains a memorial stone, set in its old gateway, inscribed with the following message: 'Within this cemetery are interred the remains of most of the British officers and men who lost their lives during the Siege of Delhi in 1857.'

If the Rajpura Military Cemetery has been destroyed by an illegal influx of local people, other sites, especially individual graves which are no longer traceable on the ground, have possibly disappeared as a consequence of a deliberate policy of the United Kingdom Government, arrived at in the aftermath of 1947. In an announcement to both Houses of Parliament on 15 March 1949, the British government clearly stated that a full-scale maintenance of all the cemeteries in India and Pakistan would be a formidable and impossible commitment for them (Bullock 1951). Apparently, 45,000 pounds were used to be spent annually on the maintenance of cemeteries through the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment. The Establishment was replaced by the British Monuments and Graves Section of the British High Commissioner's Office and it became evident that substantial reductions in cemetery expenditure would have to be made. Importantly, as the parliamentary announcement stated, while London would try to maintain several of them especially the more important of the historical cemeteries, through a limited financial commitment, 'where they could not be maintained... they should revert to nature in a dignified and decent manner' (Bullock 1951). So, it is likely that fiscal logic was the primary cause for the 'abandonment' of several 'minor' British graves and monuments in Delhi.

Along with this, the difficulties involved in preserving such monuments in the changed political circumstances must also have been a factor and, at least in one case, resulted in the deliberate destruction of an important memorial monument. Although the memorial is not in Delhi, a summary of this event is worth citing since it reveals the larger policy considerations that form the backdrop to post-independence British alterations of the landscape of the revolt. The monument in question is the Memorial Well at Kanpur in north India. Like many of the Delhi 'mutiny' monuments, this commemorated a local 1857 event, which involved the throwing into the well of bodies of Europeans apparently murdered on the instructions of the rebel leader, Nana Sahib. A memorial had been erected by the imperial government in 1863 consisting of a marble angel on the well head, while the well, set in the centre of a garden, came to be surrounded by an elaborate gothic stone arch. An inscription set out the details of this event and there were various tombs of those killed in the 'mutiny' as well. Before 1947, although Indians were admitted to the gardens on payment of an entrance fee, admittance to the well itself and to the tombs was restricted to 'Europeans'. However, on the day India became independent (15 August 1947), a large mob invaded this complex, blackened the face of the angel, broke its hands, and desecrated some of the graves.
Although the United Provinces Government immediately apologized for the desecration and carried out repairs, the future of Kanpur's Memorial Well became the subject of anxious and urgent consideration for the United Kingdom High Commission. After a great deal of discussion with the local Christian organizations of that area, the High Commission decided that the angel, along with the screen and the tombstones, would be moved to the churchyard of All Souls Memorial Church in Kanpur. But, in order to ensure that the old site of the memorial was not desecrated again, it was decided that the entire area would be levelled so as to leave no trace of its former significance. As Brigadier Bullock, who was in charge of the British Monuments and Graves Section of the High Commission put it, the 'losing of the identity' of the actual site would be done so thoroughly that no future visitor would be able to say where the well was. Bullock also wanted steps to be taken to ensure that, after this was done, the actual site of the Well was never built over since it is hallowed ground to all British and indeed Christian people, and even the slightest possibility of a secular building – not to say a Hindu temple or a Mosque – being erected over it is abhorrent' (Bullock 1948).

So, the changes that have taken place in India's 'mutiny' landscape after 1947 seem to be the result of various factors, ranging from local acts of vandalism to British policy decisions. Alterations have also resulted because of the curious manner in which the Indian government has chosen to memorialize the revolt. In Delhi, this has been done by appropriating British memorials, through the setting up of inscribed stones at some of them. The purpose of these inscriptions is to counter the narratives of the original epitaphs. Take the case of the Mutiny Memorial on the northern Ridge. Twenty-five years after India became independent, on 15 August 1972, this was 'converted' into a memorial, as the inscription at the entrance of the monument informs us, 'for those martyrs who rose and fought against the British during 1857 AD'. The conversion is confined to two inscriptions, one of which is mentioned above while the other inscription (Plait 7) points out that 'The enemy of the inscriptions on this monument were those who rose against colonial rule'. To any visitor, these messages appear to be incongruous, minimalist gestures, aimed only at challenging the British perspective. There is no separate memorial to honour the rebels, no mention at all of those who lost their lives fighting the British, nor any attempt to highlight how the revolt tied up with the history of the Delhi region.

There must be many reasons why this massive rebellion has remained forgotten in archaeological terms, ranging from the changed social composition of Delhi to the absence of a sense of history among the ruling class that inhabits India's political capital. But perhaps the most important reason has been the manner in which the national has subsumed the local here, tellingly summed up by Gupta: 'Partly because Delhi has the misfortune to be the national capital, the national is crushing the city; Tilak Nagar and Nehru Roads proliferate, and hardly anyone knows of the poetry of Mir and Zauq, the humour of Ghalib, the quality of life that Chandni Chowk once symbolized' (1981: ix).

That the rich history of Delhi's revolt has been rendered invisible through the process of 'nationalizing' it becomes evident from a site of commemoration that has recently been established – the museum of India's Freedom Struggle. Inaugurated in September 1995, the Swatantrata Sangram Sangrahalya, as it is called, is dedicated to 'the memory of the heroic men and women, peasants and workers, students and professionals who
participated in the attainment of Swaraj (self-rule)’ (Rao 1995). The museum is situated in the Red Fort, a fitting locale since this is where the 1857 revolt broke out in Delhi and, significantly enough, it has devoted one section to the revolt, presenting it as the first war of Indian independence.

Because the focus is ‘national’ rather than ‘local’, the details of the happenings in Delhi are interwoven with those of Awadh, Calcutta, Jhansi and Bihar. But, state remembrance, as the museum display reveals, remains confined to the leaders of the revolt in Delhi, personages like Bahadur Shah II and Bakht Khan, his military commander. The social memory of the others who lost their lives in the city is not accorded a place in this gallery – Sayyad Mohammad Ahir, the calligraphist, Bahadur Singh, a resident of Gurgaon, Ganga Prasad Kayastha, who lived in Chandni Chowk, Azimullah Khan, another Delhi resident and editor of Paigham-e-Azad (‘Message of Freedom’) are just a handful, from a list which includes thousands of names, of those who were hanged by the British on charges of treason and sedition (Chopra 1974). Their role has not been thought to be worthy of remembrance.

In conclusion, then, the form in which the commemoration of 1857 has come to be materially constituted has much to do with the selection and construction of a particular kind of past. In Delhi’s ‘national’ culture, very little place has been created for a historic moment in its ‘local’ history. At the same time, with shifts in the social basis of political power, remembrance can assume new material forms. In another theatre of the 1857 revolt, the city of Meerut where the sepoy mutiny first broke out, the ‘local’ has now made its presence felt. Recently, the names of eighty-five sepoys who spearheaded the army
rebellion there have been put up in the Shahid (Martyrs') park, while a statue of an 1857 rebel called Dhuni Singh Ketzwal waits to be installed. The manner in which the changed political sociology of the region has contributed to the creation of such memorials is worth exploring but is beyond the ambit of this article. What it does force us to recognize, though, is that the social commemoration of 1857 continues to be inscribed in new ways. In the future, it is entirely possible that the rebels of Delhi— their voices and acts—will be remembered in a material form which will raise them above their present marginalized and faceless status.

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