Heritage: Between Affect and Ideology in a Colonial Cemetery

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AMBIVALENT HERITAGE

Between Affect and Ideology in a Colonial Cemetery

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Abstract

This article examines the significance of colonial cemeteries and explains why they are sites of neglect and decay in contemporary India. By examining the ideological and affective meanings of a colonial funerary landscape like the Park Street cemetery in Calcutta, it shows how monuments of colonial memories have transformed into signs of temporal ruptures, which disturbs the dichotomy between the colonial and the postcolonial. It argues that the discard and abandonment of colonial cemeteries in the postcolonial landscape stems from the ambivalent meaning that such a heritage site generates. Using three pairs of conceptual constructs – Kristeva's genotext and phenotext; Freud's melancholy and mourning; and tropological metaphor and metonymy – I demonstrate that this ambivalence is located in an intersection between the funerary monument as a cultural product of a colonial ideology, and as a memorial artifact of personal bereavement.

Key Words ◆ affect ◆ Calcutta ◆ death in the colony ◆ funerary landscape ◆ ideology ◆ postcolonial

INTRODUCTION

In the heart of the city of Calcutta, in the midst of the great turmoil of a big metropolis, is the home of the dead – the last remains of a colonial community. This relic of a tumultuous era lies buried in the Park Street cemetery – one of the earliest modern cemeteries in the world. Today, the cemetery is situated in the center of Calcutta's commercial and residential district, surrounded by upper-middle-class apartment buildings

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and business establishments. It is a silent testament to an imperial regime amidst the chaotic environs of its now postcolonial subjects, who live, work, and ignore the dead remains of their earlier masters. The cemetery is rarely visited by any of its neighbors; just like the dead remains it houses, it is in a state of decay – slowly dying a sad death. Ignored by the postcolony (Mbembe, 2001), it has not been destroyed, but allowed to slip into a gradual death. The Park Street cemetery is thus a monument of double death – the decaying remains of its inmates, and its own death, as it lies forgotten by both the present and the past. It is also a heritage of double absence: the absence of its inmates and its own absence. Here, the dead are lost to the ravages of time and the commemorative monument of the dead does not hold significance for the present. The monument mimics the disintegration of the inhabitants that it preserves. It is an artifact of a colony that the postcolony has forgotten – a heritage absent from maps of the postcolonial mind.

In this article, I demonstrate that the discard, decay and abandonment of colonial memorial monuments in the postcolonial landscape stems from the ambivalent meanings that such a heritage site generates. I illustrate this by examining numerous ideological and affective meanings a colonial funerary site like the Park Street cemetery produces in a postcolonial landscape. This ambivalence is generated by the intersection of three pairs of conceptually similar and intangible entities – the

first is a formal pair, the second an affective pair, and the third a tropological pair. I make the case that the postcolonial ambivalence of the Park Street cemetery is located in a liminal space between these three pairs of conceptual constructs. The first is Julia Kristeva's idea of *genotext and phenotext* (see Kristeva, 1984), which I utilize to examine the relationship between the monumentality of the colonial memorial tomb and its affective epitaphs. The second is Freud's contemplation on the difference between *melancholy* and *mourning*, used in order to examine the subtext of inscriptional epitaphs as intimate obituary to the cause of colonial expansion. And, finally, I use the tropological interaction of *metaphor* and *metonymy* to examine the indexical nature of the Park Street cemetery as a monument of history. By employing these pairs of constructs I show that the meaning of commemorative colonial monuments such as the Park Street cemetery is located in an intersection between the funerary monument as a cultural product of a colonial ideology, and as a memorial artifact of personal bereavement. I argue that postcolonial ambivalence is to be found in the invisible hyphen between the post and colonial of the *postcolonial*. These monuments of colonial memories are signs of temporal ruptures, which disturb the dichotomy of the colonial and the postcolonial and reveal the discomfort of postcolonial ideology in dealing with its colonial past, a past, which spills over into its present. Before I proceed to the central argument of this article, I first contextualize the historical location of Park Street and in subsequent sections, I situate the importance of Park Street cemetery within the larger scholarship on funerary landscape.

THE CEMETERY AND ITS HISTORICAL LOCATION

The Park Street cemetery houses more than 1600 dead – buried over a period of more than 150 years when the colonial power was at its zenith in India. The earliest grave dates to 1767 and the last memorial was erected in 1895 (BACSA, 1992; O'Connell and Madge, 1911). A thoroughfare called Park Street divided the cemetery into South and North cemeteries (the latter opened in 1796).[1] The pathway was earlier called the Burial Ground Road and was renamed Park Street after a private deer park, which covered most of the present commercial and residential district (India Office and Oriental Records, London [henceforth IOOR] R/4/80 File 10/2). Once known as the 'Great Cemetery', the Park Street cemetery was one of the earliest non-church cemeteries in the world and probably the largest Christian cemetery outside Europe and America in the 19th century. It was also possibly one of the first cemeteries in the world, which was a direct product of 18th-century medical discourse on the dead body and its relationship to the spread of contagious diseases (see Blechyndess, 1978 [1905]: 129; Curl, 1972, 2002; Mytum, 1989: 287).

Park Street cemetery was a burial ground that housed not only the dead remains of the colonial bureaucracy, military officials, mercantile elite and their families but also common and sundry citizenry. These were among the earliest Europeans who came to Calcutta from a different world, thousands of miles away, leaving their families and homes in search of money, fame, and power (see Moorhouse, 1971; Dutta, 1994; Pearson, 1954; Sykes, 1992). Some died naturally, others in wars, many in epidemics, and a few of old age.[2] In the cemetery are buried housewives, children, ministers, secretaries, navy officers, artillery captains, infantry soldiers and just plain folks.[3] They made a living in the new city of Calcutta that their ancestors had established in the 17th century. Evocatively writing in a pamphlet intended to raise money for the maintenance of the cemetery, nearly a century after it was closed, Maurice Shellim of the Association of the Preservation of Historic Cemeteries in India (APHCI) sympathetically notes that these were the Europeans who 'spent their short span in a distant land, many for gain, some for glory or in service of their country, a few for their faith, others to keep the King's peace or enrich an ancient culture with an offering of their own' (Shellim, 1997: 7). During their stay, the city was transformed from a small, dingy trading port to the biggest metropolis this side of London. By the late 18th century, it had a population of 1 million, of which a small minority were colonial servants and members of the European mercantile class, who made a living in Calcutta, sweating in its tropical and humid heat, cooled only during the long spell of monsoon – swelling with mosquitoes, malaria, and marsh (see Cotton, 1980[1909]; Busteed, 1897; Chaudhuri, 1990; Martin, 1997; Nair, 1984, 1989; Pal, 1990; Roy Choudhury, 1998). As Shellim compassionately notes:

> Their hard hot lives were solaced by none of the alleviations of a modern Indian existence. With few lofty ceilings or airy verandahs, without ice, without medical knowledge of and no immunity to tropical diseases and fevers, they lived at the mercy of the severe and unrelenting climate of their environment and were all too often cut down in their youth. (Shellim, 1997: 9)

Most wanted to gain fame and wealth and go back to Europe, to their ancestral abode. Some who chose to remain, intentionally or inadvertently, died, and finally were buried in the land they subjugated (see Hunter, 1897; Wilkinson, 1976).

These dead are commemorated with monumental tombs, some enormous in their size and sheer volume – huge canopies, supported by giant pillars, structures raised to about 100 ft above ground – providing a grandiose effect. Others are more humble and consist of obelisks set on square podia, or mere marble slabs covering family burials with intimate histories of the deceased clan. The most monumental memorials imitate the pyramids of Egypt, others are imposing cenotaphs faithful to the designs found in Victorian England and are examples of neoclassical influence (Curl, 2002: 142–3; Davies, 1985: 61; Nilsson, 1968: 150).[4] Some tombs are like small brick houses, others mausoleums in the form of temples coated with stucco and then painted. The architectural feature of each tomb in the cemetery imitates the glory of the British Raj – its power, its ideological ubiquity. As Rudyard Kipling sardonically notes in the chapter on the Park Street cemetery in his *City of Dreadful Night* – a scathing commentary on colonial Calcutta:

> The tombs are small houses. It is as though we walked down the streets of a town, so tall are they and so closely do they stand – a town shrivelled by fire, and scarred by frost and siege. Men must have been afraid of their friends rising up before the due time that they weighted them with such cruel mounds of masonry. (Kipling, 1891)

These monuments were built during the height of colonial rule and exhibited, like the architectural buildings of colonial India, its imperial ideology (Metcalf, 1989). The monumentality of the tombs was in a mimetic relationship to the power of the British strength, and its authority. In their monumentality, we see the self-image of the imperial subject – even in death, he is not humble. Melancholia and mourning gave way to pompous architecture, full of self-pride, exhibiting control over the landscape. Kipling in his typical disdain, remarks: 'men were rich in those days and could afford to put a hundred cubic feet of masonry into the grave of even so humble a person as "Jno. Clements, Captain of the Country Service, 1820"' (Kipling, 1891).

Soon after Indian independence (August 1947) the erstwhile colonial government decided to withdraw funding for the upkeep of colonial civil cemeteries throughout the country. Neither was the postcolonial government interested in their maintenance. Though the military graves were put under the charge of the Imperial War Graves Commission, the fate of civilian cemeteries, all over India was to be decided by the local committees under the aegis of the British High Commission Office in New Delhi. In the case of the South and North Park Street cemeteries, it was decided around 1948 to 'level' them off and a 'Garden of Remembrance' be constructed in its place (IOOR European Manuscript – F146/6).[5] It is remarkable that it was the Bishop and other members of the Christian Ecclesiastical establishment in Calcutta who were strongly in favor of clearing the cemeteries. Local British and Anglo-Indian citizens in Calcutta met this with stiff resistance and voices of protest were also raised in London. Questions were raised in the British Parliament and the discrimination between military graves and civilian cemeteries questioned:

> it is not only soldiers and prominent people belonging to the service who we should remember but the glorious unsung army of middle class and especially those women of whom so many have devoted

> their lives to the 'women and children of India' and whose service and devotion is recounted for all time on their tombstone. (IOOR European Manuscript – F146/6)

Rudimentary fund collections were initiated, but were not successful in collecting a significant amount. By 1953, it was decided to raze the North Park Street cemetery, and use the income obtained by leasing the land for the upkeep of the more historic South Park Street cemetery (IOOR R/4/80; File 10/2 and R/4/339; File 167/170/1). Also pressure by the office of the then Chief Minister of West Bengal, Dr B.C. Ray, was decisive in this demolition. He 'was rather worried about these cemeteries as they were being used as public latrines as well as by goondas [ruffians] and other bad hats in Calcutta for clandestine purposes' (IOOR R/4/80; File 10/2; Ref: E.2580/ECC/110).

In the late 1970s there were concerted attempts by the British Association for Cemeteries in South Asia (BACSA) and APHCI to restore the cemetery (IOOR European Manuscript F 370/623 and 634). The West Bengal State Archaeology Directorate has only designated a few tombs of noted colonial personalities (for example those of Sir William Jones and Henry D'rozio) in Park Street cemetery as protected monuments (Mukherji, 1997: 8–9), but has kept the complex outside the purview of the powerful Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (1958). The cemetery is now under the care of some gardeners and security personnel hired by the APHCI and the Christian Burial Board,[6] who protect the site from falling into ruins.

Today, the Park Street cemetery sporadically features in the imagination of the people of Calcutta as a space where the masters of a bygone era are buried. In a postcolonial nation, the colonial masters do not have any place; they are the dead who must be removed from the sight of the living. In the past few years, huge apartment complexes have mushroomed around the cemetery, along with a multi-storied parking lot. What was a couple of centuries ago, marshland, miles away from the colonial settlement, approached by a narrow, lonely causeway, is now a fashionable shopping precinct. Until the middle of the 19th century, this area was a dense tropical bamboo forest frequented by the colonial elite on tiger hunts. Today, it is a jungle of colonial, modern and postmodern buildings, jostling for space in a city of more than 13 million people. This mass graveyard of colonial power (figurative and material) has become a source of contempt for the Calcuttans, as most Europeans and their descendants have left the country. Kids play football in its wide empty field, drug addicts hang out in the dark niches of its grand tombs and an occasional film shoot breaks its serene tranquility. Neglected by its neighbors, it is taken care of by a group of gardeners who are usually seen pruning the over growing waves of grass or are huddled in shady corners playing cards on warm summer afternoons. For these subaltern

workmen, and other Calcuttans who encounter the silence of the Park Street cemetery, it is a site of rot and abandonment, a heritage without affective value that yet cannot be negated.

THE COLONIAL DEAD IN CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP

In this section, I contextualize the performative location of the Park Street cemetery as a cultural landscape within the lager rubric of academic work on colonial India. There are three disciplinary formulations that could have engaged with a cultural heritage like the Park Street cemetery within the confines of their discursive frameworks, but a gaping absence is noticeable. The first is art and architecture studies of British India, a discipline that has been primarily concerned with the power and grandeur of the monumentality of colonial architecture (Davies, 1985; Metcalf, 1989; Nilsson, 1968). These studies have either been confined to locating colonial buildings within the general framework of the expansion of the Empire or have attempted to historically place their locations within the ideology of the Raj (Metcalf, 1995). Both approaches have neglected to consider the marginal architectural culture of the colony – jails, prisons, military barracks, colonial cantonments, factories, mills, industrial spaces, and cemeteries – although some texts do make a token gesture towards this kind of cultural landscape. The other discipline, which could have played a crucial role in comprehending the meaning of such colonial landscape, is historical archaeology. In India, this sub-discipline is virtually non-existent and the Indian archaeological community (Archaeological Survey of India, State Archaeology Directorates, or various University departments) is not interested in the archaeology of this period.[7] Finally, colonial historiography – both the nationalistic and the subaltern schools – have ignored material culture either as primary sources for constructing narratives of colonial India or as objects of critical scrutiny. Implicit in this article is a claim to consider colonial material culture as a form of primary source material in order to construct more nuanced narratives of colony and colonization in India.

The relationship between colonial cemeteries and ideology in the sub-discipline of historical archaeology has been conclusively demonstrated by archaeologists working in the context of Victorian Cambridge (Parker Pearson, 1982) and early European settlements in the colonial United States (McGuire, 1988). Both studies argue that there is a dialectical relationship between material culture and social structures, and show that ideological subtexts are reflected and reproduced in colonial funerary monuments. This interpretative apparatus is closely related to the emphasis in post-processual archaeology on the symbolic and

structural meaning of material culture. The emphasis is on an archaeological analysis of power relationships that governed social interactions in the past (Hodder, 1982; Parker Pearson, 1982; Shanks and Tilley, 1982; Miller and Tilley, 1984; Kristiansen, 1984). However, in its focus upon investigating the discursive power of ideology as the primary locus for comprehending the meaning of material culture, the affective valence of funerary monuments is lost in the works of Parker Pearson and McGuire. In response to the conceptual shortcomings of these power-centered examinations of the past, archaeology of emotion and bereavement has been argued by Sarah Tarlow to be a more appropriate methodology for understanding the meaning of funerary monuments (1999). Her approach dislocates the power/ideology axis in understanding the representation of death and allocates agency to the affective performance of such bereavement monuments. It lays emphasis on 'the importance of emotional experience in structuring social, political and economic relationships in the past' (Tarlow, 1999: 183). I submit that in comprehending the valence of colonial cemeteries as heritage sites in a postcolonial landscape, applying any *one* of these methodological insights is unproductive. In order to interpret these complex sites, it is necessary to engage with both theoretical frameworks since colonial funerary monuments are not only the cultural products of a colonial ideology but also memorial artifacts of personal bereavement.

It is important to note that a colonial memorial heritage like the Park Street cemetery is distinct from the similar funerary landscape that sprang up in Europe (Curl, 1972; McManners, 1981; Morley, 1971) or in colonial America (Farrell, 1980; Meyer, 1989) in the 18th and 19th centuries. They cannot be conflated, because unlike the Euro-American memorial monuments, which primarily played an emotional role as bereavement monuments for the grieving community, the colonial cemeteries in India had a dual function. They were not just commemorative or bereavement memorials, but were also monuments that fixed over a captured terrain, the mark of conquest. They were a material manifestation of the moment of conflict between the invading colonial army and local resistance.

AN AMBIVALENT HERITAGE

The Park Street cemetery is a heritage monument of paradox – that of being dead and buried in a conquered country. The colonial cemetery in the postcolony is located in the irony of its previous glory, its past power, and its present powerlessness. It is in this ironical crevice of the postcolonial landscape that the ambivalent meaning of cemetery is located. Very much like the World War II Nazi graves scattered across Europe, the Park Street cemetery is a war cemetery in an alien country. It is the

conglomeration of monumental tombs of a war that was constantly fought for 200 years. Analogous to war monuments, this cemetery houses the soldiers of an invading army. This memorial heritage is a tangible sign of conflict and subjugation, but its material significance is embedded in an affective memorialization of personal bereavement. Its contemporary significance is located in its being a material culture with both ideological and affective connotations, thus producing contradictory and incompatible meanings.

There are two terms in heritage studies that have attempted to classify monuments whose erection originates in a historical moment of conflict, contradiction, or deep contestation – 'dissonant heritage' and 'negative heritage'. The dissonance in dissonant heritage 'involves a discordance or lack of agreement and consistency' (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996: 22) and is seen clearly in the *heritage of atrocity*, such as war memorials, holocaust memorials and other monuments or architecture with a subtext of violence. Similarly, 'negative heritage' is either appropriated for a 'positive didactic purpose (e.g. Auschwitz, Hiroshima, District Six)', or otherwise erased like Nazi and Soviet Statues and architectures (Meskell, 2002: 558). The Park Street cemetery is distinct from these types of heritage in its more ambivalent status. Although most of the colonial heritage in the postcolony can be subsumed under the taxonomic grasp of dissonant heritage or negative heritage – a site like the Park Street cemetery resists these classificatory boundaries and is located in a nebulous and undefined conceptual space. It can neither be culturally appropriated nor completely obliterated from the postcolonial landscape, and it occupies a space of conflicting emotions and indeterminate meaning. It is a heritage that is a clear reminder of an oppressive occupation, however, it is also a site of mourning and has come to have an ambivalent meaning for Calcutta's population. The semiotic content of such ambivalence is produced in the tension between the dual symbolic position that the Park Street cemetery occupies – a monument to colonial ideology which is simultaneously a memorial to the dead.

The ambivalence of the Park Street cemetery is generated by its historical, idiosyncratic location – a colonial memorial of remembrance in the postcolony. In a *nationscape* (conceptually analogous to landscape or cityscape) like India in which the colonial past as negative heritage is at best appropriated to denote the nationalist project, and at worst destroyed or decimated, a site like the Park Street cemetery presents an ideological predicament. This heritage can neither be appropriated in the nationalistic imagination nor can it be completely negated – it can at best be forgotten. A distinctive postcolonial ambivalence is exhibited in the relationship between the postcolonial state and the colonial architecture. Similar to the idea of colonial ambivalence discussed by Homi Bhabha (Bhabha, 1994: 85–92), the postcolonial mind mimics the colonial

psyche, for it appropriates whatever it deems fit and discards the colonial unwanted (Chatterjee, 1993; Prakash, 1999). In post independence India, the state has approached many colonial monuments as negative heritage that are either culturally rehabilitated, or completely destroyed. Examples of the former process include various colonial monuments like the Writers' Building or the Governor's House in Calcutta, which were the nerve centers of colonial power. Today they house the office of the Chief Minister and the Governor of West Bengal respectively. These colossal colonial official buildings have thus been appropriated both symbolically and physically as sites of postcolonial power. Illustrations of negative heritage, completely expunged from the postcolonial *nationscape*, are the mutilated statues of colonial personalities, which adorned major crossroads of colonial Bombay, and today lie discarded in the corner of the Jijamata Udayan (Bombay Municipal Zoo, formerly known as the Victoria Gardens).[8] But a colonial heritage like the Park Street cemetery has been allowed to wither away, for it does not fit either of these categories and must be relegated to an ambivalent space, where in postcolonial India it can neither be appropriated nor destroyed. The postcolony deals with the dilemma of an ambivalent heritage like the Park Street cemetery *by forgetting the site of remembrance*. The cemetery and its hundreds of tombs are officially forgotten (but not erased) by the state and the people. They are consigned to a corner of the postcolonial nationscape, to decay and collapse under their own imperial glory. The Park Street cemetery is a classic case of such forgetfulness, rarely mentioned even as a minor tourist site by the State Tourism department. This is the state of not just the 'Great Cemetery' in Calcutta, but of all British colonial cemeteries in India found at the fringes of British cantonment towns throughout India. In 1947 such cemeteries numbered 1350, out of which only 350 were still in use (IOOR European Manuscript F 146/6).[9] It is also significant to note that colonial funerary memorials and cemeteries, with their origin in imperial expansions, are in varying states of abandonment and decay not only in South Asia but also in other parts of the postcolonial world (for other examples see Ride and Ride, 1996).

A MEMORIAL OF AFFECTIVE IDEOLOGY

The symbolic power of the monumental tombs of the Park Street Cemetery originates in an indexicality that functions both as a sign of bereavement and as material evidence of colonial domination. Using Julia Kristeva's framework of text as a process of production in which the deep, underlying *genotext* generates the superficial *phenotext* (Kristeva, 1984), we can comprehend the ideological manifestation of the cemetery as a monument of ideology and concurrently a symbol of emotional exegesis. For Kristeva, the text is a mode of production whose

epistemological meaning is brought about by the interplay with its obvious 'communicating utterance, aiming to inform directly' and that of its subtext, the 'different utterance' which is, 'anterior to or synchronic' with the obvious communicative gesture (quoted in Barthes, 1981: 36). The former communicative utterance becomes the phenotext and the different utterance the genotext. In definitional terms the phenotext is 'the verbal phenomenon as it presents itself in the structure of the concrete statement', whereas the genotext 'sets out the grounds for the logical operations proper to the constitution of the subject of the enunciation' (in Barthes, 1981: 38; see also Barthes, 1994; Jameson, 1976). I find this distinction between the obvious superficial components of the text with its deeper underlying structures useful in comprehending the inscriptional epitaphs of the Park Street cemetery. At the obvious level they are texts, which perform a crucial role in the theatre of pain that a cemetery represents but the deeper underlying meaning is located in the ideological genotext of colonialism. As an example, let us look at an epitaph of a colonial official:

Here lie the remains of
Augustus Cleveland, Esquire,
late Collector of the Revenue;
Judge of the Dewanny Adawlat of the
Districts of Bhaugulpore, Monghyr, Rajamahal,
&c. &c.
he departed this life 12th January 1784, at sea
on board the 'Atlas' Indiaman, Captain Cooper,
Proceeding to the Cape for the recovery of his health,
aged 29 Years
His remains, preserved in spirit, were brought
Up to town in the Pilot sloop which attended the
'Atlas'
and interred here on the 30th of the same month.
The public and private virtues of this excellent
young man, were singularly eminent
in his public capacity;
he accomplished by a system of conciliation
what could never be effected by a system by Military coercion;
he civilized a savage race of the mountaineers,
who for ages had existed in a state of barbarism,
and eluded every exertion that had been practiced
against them to suppress their depredations,
and reduced them to obedience;
to his wise and beneficent conduct,
the English East India Company
were indebted for the subjecting to their Government,
the numerous inhabitants of that wild
and extensive country, the Jungleteterry.
In his private station,

by the amiableness of his deportment,
the gentleness of his manner
By the goodness and generosity of his heart,
he was universally admired,
beloved and respected by all
who had the happiness of knowing him.

The ideological content of this epitaph on the tomb of a dead British colonial servant is a clear example of how a funerary tomb is transformed into a monument of power. The event of death is transformed from a personal emotional loss to a passing experienced by the whole community. The phenotext of this inscription clearly alludes to the great service that Cleveland did to the service of mankind, and is adorned by the narrative of the civilizing mission. Cleveland was a martyr who penetrated the *heart of darkness* and civilized the barbarians, assimilated them into the grace of the mighty empire. The genotext of inscription is bounded by a narrative of a benevolent English company, which did not force the natives into subjugation but transformed them into meek subjects. It is this ideological structure that both frames the emotive phenotext of the inscription and also allows for the construction of a magnificent commemorative monument to be erected in a cemetery where only the lords of the last empire were buried.

It is interesting to note at the end of the epitaph – above a quotation, which works as a paratext – an addendum to prove the munificence of the colonial regime and the sincere obligation that the enlightened subjects felt towards their master. For it was Cleveland who civilized them and brought them from the fringes of humanity into the domain of the empire. Framed in parentheses, the inscription reads:

> The principal Natives who had been subject to his control solicited permission to give some public testimony of the sense they entertained of the beneficence which he had invariably shewn towards them, by erecting also a Monument to his Memory, which was accordingly done, and expenses of it were defrayed by voluntary subscription on their part.

If we read the overtly moving commemorative text on the epitaph as the superficial phenotext, then the ideology of colonialism is the genotextual formulation, which governs the affective content of the funerary monument. It is in the relational tension between the phenotextual and genotextual make up of the tomb (both its monumental architecture and its bereavement text) that ambivalence is generated, in which is located the cause of its postcolonial decay, but not its death. The funerary memorial becomes a representational text that produces an ambivalent meaning in the context of postcolonial Calcutta. Though it is a monument of grief, its basis is colonialism, and in postcolonial India, it does not have any political or cultural valence.

The signification of the memorial monument functions as a semiotic device that produces a *significance* meandering between ideology of the colonial power and the emotional affect of the funerary monument. Understanding this muted significance is imperative in order to comprehend the ambivalence that such a site produces in postcolonial India. It is located in the tension between the affective desire of the monument and the symbolic valence of its ideology. The Park Street cemetery signifies a deep loss of young members of the family, especially those youths who have given their lives in military pursuits and have brought glory to the emerging English suzerainty over the subcontinent. The rhetoric of bereavement and pain is brought about through Christian expressions which announce the demise of the buried: 'the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord' or more secular but succinctly affective 'in the midst of life, we are in death'. A narrative of intense loss and pain is conjoined with these phrases but the subtext is coded in the achievement of colonial hegemony and domination:

Sacred to the Memory of
Captain Peter Henry,
of his Majesty's fourteenth Regiment of Infantry,
son of Mr. Thomas Henry, F.R.S., London,
and President of the Literary and Philosophical
Society of Manchester,
His zeal in the discharge of duties of
his profession,
his uniform kindness to the subalterns and privates
of his Regt., and his friendly and social disposi
-tion, joined to his other virtues,
rendered his death a source of real sorrow
to the officers of the distinguished corps
in which he had served above ten years.
He died June 4th, 1808, aged 24 years.

The genealogical roots of the departed are crucial in signifying the validity of the civilizing mission, visible in the deceased's relationship with his native subordinates. The bereavement memorial became a symbol of much more than personal loss, as its erection in a colonial landscape transformed it into an ideological monument of martyrdom and triumph. These monuments commemorated the expansion of colonial ideology and concomitantly marked the intense personal grief of bereaved relatives.

OBITUARY OF COLONIAL MARTYRDOM

For the colonial community, the affective valence of the Park Street cemetery was situated in the melancholia of intense personal grief and in the colonial performance of death as a communal loss. Its meaning

emerged from an interaction between emotions of personal melancholia and the public display of mourning. Here Freud's contemplation on the difference between mourning and melancholia is helpful in understanding the affective valence of the Park Street cemetery as a site located at the intersection of an ideology of colonial domination and private grief. In his 1917 essay *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud argues that although both melancholia and mourning emerge from the same loss and share numerous similar exterior characteristics, they differ in their mental features. The vital factor for Freud is that they are both accompanied by a 'grave departure from normal attitude to life' (Freud, 1984: 252). However, in the case of mourning, it lapses after a certain time. In the case of melancholia, it develops into an illness. For Freud, melancholia is a pathological disorder, in which object loss is transformed into ego loss. The crucial difference is that 'in mourning it is the world that becomes poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself' (Freud, 1984: 254). In colonial Calcutta, the funerary monument became both a site of public mourning through the erection of the memorial monument and a location to express personal melancholia in the form of an obituary written on the tomb. The symbolic valence of the monument derived its meaning from this interaction between a public articulation of personal pain and the obituary as a colonial performance of martyrdom. The Park Street cemetery thus is an emotive landscape of affection where the melancholic disposition of the survivors is bracketed by a public act of mourning with ideological ramifications. Here the theatre of pain is produced by the interaction between the monumental architecture of the memorial monument and the writing of death as melancholic mourning. For example, let us look at a typical *obituary-epitaph*.

To the Memory of Thomas Henry Graham,
son of Thomas Graham, Esq.
(late a Member of the Supreme Council in Bengal)

> who fell gloriously in an action between the Honorable East India Company's Ship 'Kent', and a French privateer in the mouth of the Ganges, on the 7th of October 1800, the day on which he completed the sixteenth year of his age. Tho' his terrestrial career was thus short it displayed a great and varied excellence, endowed with superior talents he cultivated them, with unwearied industry and amiable success; and to these literary acquirements which commanded respect he added the amiable manners which secured the friendship of his associates. The premature close of a life so full of promises was honoured by sincere and general sorrows, and his afflicted parent, to whom after a long separation he was about to be restored with all the accomplishments of a liberal education, and under whose eye he was about to commence his duties as a Civil Servant on the Honorable Company's Bengal Establishment, hath erected this Memorial to perpetuate the remembrance of a son so deservedly the object of his affection and regret.

Such inscriptions performed the dual role of expressing personal melancholia and of functioning as an obituary in the context of ideological expansion. Here the individual loss of a son and its personal consequence is contextualized (and thus justified) within the ideological subtext of colonial domination. The emotional significance of the memorial monument is not just produced within the confines of the sentiments of bereavement but is also situated in the passing of a soldier protecting colonial interests and the loss of a colonial bureaucrat. Thus the symbolic meaning that the monument produced during the moment of its usage was located not only in the emotive importance of the site or in its ideological manifestation, but in an affective space situated between both the ideological and emotive extremes. This, as I show later, was closely linked to a simultaneous emergence of *obituary* binding the community of mourners throughout colonial India.

Central to each tomb was the *obituary-epitaph*, a combination of private melancholia and public mourning. The rise of the newspaper in western Europe and its relationship to the emergence of nationalism is well documented (Anderson, 1983). This also gave rise to a peculiar genre of melancholic writing of mourning – the 'obituary' and the 'death announcement', which Petrucci argues 'took their place in the universal concert of "news" of public importance' (1998: 120). In 17th-century Europe, the epitaph became 'the most essential part of funerary

decorations because they are its soul. They illustrate the subject, they give speech to the figures, the emblem, and the coats of arms' (quoted in Petrucci, 1998: 91). But by the 19th century, the epitaph fulfilled the function of the written records in 'absentia', like that of the obituary or the death announcement. Memorial inscriptions communicated deep personal grief and simultaneously were symptoms of the need to make such loss a communal experience. These cemeteries had the 'social function of collective memory' (Petrucci, 1998: 99), where the death was a performance of not just personal loss but bereavement experienced by the community as a whole.

In Calcutta, the need to create alliances within the colonial community through the performance of death is exhibited very clearly in the tomb inscriptions. The *obituary-epitaph* was a crucial affective element in the public life of the British subject in Calcutta. Its importance can be judged from the fact that in 1848, a compilation of the memorial epitaphs in Eastern India was published. This text, called the *Bengal Obituary,* was a detailed document that also contained biographical information and miscellaneous notices about the important figures of colonial India. The objective of the text, as its authors claimed, was twofold: '[O]n the one hand, a memorial of such as have passed away from time to eternity, it will serve. On the other, and in great measure, to influence the conduct of succeeding rulers' (Holmes, 1851: v). The community-building activity of colonial settlement went hand in hand with colonial expansion: the text of *Bengal Obituary* reads as a martyr-list of those who died conquering India. The primary aim of the compilers was to:

> perpetuate, cherish, and embalm their memory, which becomes doubly dear from the consideration that they fought, bled, and devoted their entire lives and energies to promoting the glory of their country and the good of the people whom Providence has willed that they should rule. (Holmes, 1851: v)

It is significant to note that the *Bengal Obituary* was not an isolated case of memorial compilation. It was preceded by three other such texts, though not as vast in scope, but similar in structure – *Asiaticus: In Two Parts* (Hawkesworth, 1803), *Oriental Obituary* (Urquhart, 1809), and *The Complete Monumental Register* (Derozario, 1815).[10] By the early 20th century, the need to remember the earliest descendants of the colonial rulers was also felt by the colonial government. Between c. 1896 and 1935, this activity of communal remembrance was taken over by the provincial government. In one such text, its author emphatically notes:

> 'Why', wrote a distinguished Civilian in 1892, 'why should there not be a *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicae Britannicae*, giving the epitaphs of the men who lived and died to build up British India? They would be better reading than the bland platitudes of Asoka'. (Wilson, 1896)

MONUMENT AS A HISTORICAL INDEX

Today the tombs of the Park Street cemetery, though erected as commemorative monuments, do not serve memorial functions any more. Those buried have been lost to the ravages of time, and those surviving have no direct relatives buried there. The cemetery has a historic value attached to it; the emotional content of the monuments is distanced by numerous generations. Although some tourists do visit the cemetery in search of ancestors, the cemetery does not have a direct relation to a memory, told or lived in this generation. The significance of the cemetery as a historical monument, rather than a mourning monument has found its way into the discourse of those who protect the monument. As Shellim writes:

> While some may cavil at the claim of sepulchral monuments to be called art, none may doubt that graves and funerary relics, by giving substance to the sentiments, customs, and beliefs of a people, shed light on the measure of their civilization. (Shellim, 1997: 7)

For some, the affective valence of the cemetery was situated in between the memories of ancestors and the sublime pleasure of the landscape of the dead. For others, it was a somber landscape that evoked the history of a bygone era. It was transformed into a nostalgic memorial, which provided a rich history of the earliest colonial settlers of Calcutta – a kind of genealogical signpost, which gave information about those who came before.[11]

The tombstone as a metaphor functions as a historical record, and gets right into the moment of history. It has the indexical nature of history as it tells us about the past, in the way a historical text does. It is the epigraphical nature of the indexicality that makes the tomb a metaphoric engagement with the past (Ernst, 1999). The succinct inscription: 'To the Memory of/James Robert Wadeson,/Aged 27 years;/Died the 11th April 1785' propels the viewer directly into the sinews of historical temporality. The date, the name, and age provide an indexical referentiality that has a concrete air about it, and that imparts an epistemological authority to the materiality of the funerary monument. It 'performs a juridically and culturally essential function of authentication' (Petrucci, 1998: 60). It works as an indispensable, but autonomous and complementary component of the funerary monument. This metaphorical relationship of the memorial tomb with history has a significant valence to the few tourists who regularly visit the Park Street cemetery. These are the few hundred foreign tourists who come to Calcutta to look for memories of a *colony*. For them, and especially those searching for their ancestors, the Park Street cemetery is a site of remembrance and memory. It is a location where the abject interacts with memorial *fragments* to produce a narrative of the past (Domanska, 2000;

Kristeva, 1982). Here inscriptions transform the cemetery into a metaphor of the past, which provides a rich history of the earliest colonial settlers of Calcutta – a kind of a material genealogy of the past (Casey, 1997; Klein, 2000).

Other than the direct metaphorical connotation that the Park Street cemetery has to the memory of those who lay buried, it also has a metonymical function – that of signifying a soulful moment in time. The postcolonial meaning of this monument is also produced between these two figurative affects that the monument produces. The semiotic location of the Park Street cemetery is at the intersection between the monument as a *metonymy* and the monument as a *metaphor*. Here, the referentiality of history and the memorial tangibility of archaeology interact with each other to produce a narrative of remembrance. The tombs of the deceased act as a metonymy, then transfix the memory of the dead in the ontology of materiality. The monument becomes the signification of the dead in the world of the living. It functions as a cartographic sign that provides an orientation to the past. It is a 'signpost' on the map of time that gives us directions towards a world that we cannot visit, but only experience in its ethereality. Or, as Frank Ankersmit while contemplating the indexicality of the Holocaust monument of Yad Vashem in Israel, writes:

> the monument functions like an index: it requires us to look in a certain direction without specifying what we shall ultimately find in that direction. Even more so, by being content with its mere indexicality, the monument not only leaves us free, but strongly invites us to project our own personal feelings and associations on that part of the past indicated by it. (Ankersmit, 2001: 179)

The landscape of the cemetery crowded with monumental funerary remains becomes a site that is endowed with a distinct discursive movement between memory and nostalgia. Here, authentic encounters with the past can be *actually* experienced; unlike other memorial monuments, a grave tomb is a marker of the dead buried below. This metonymy is exemplified by the relationship between the actual relic of the subject whose memory and nostalgia has been invoked. This metonymical character in the case of the Park Street cemetery can have multiple semiotic valences, for it can be an engagement with the past both as a memorial of pain or as a monument of estrangement. This monument, unlike the one Ankersmit writes about, does not represent the acts of the people buried there in living memory. It represents a site, which has slipped from memory into history – a fact that drove 19th-century colonial citizens in Calcutta to pen the *Bengal Obituary*. The motive was to perpetuate the memory of the dead, slowly slipping from the domain of the living: 'feeble though the attempt may be, something, however has been done to perpetuate the memory of those who claim our affection or veneration' (Holmes, 1851: v).

CONCLUSION

My attempt in this article has been to write an *affective history* of the colony, emphasizing primarily the materiality of the colonial record in order to understand the postcolony. It is neither a product of a post-structuralist critique, which attributes sole agency of the history of colonial trajectory to ideological manifestation of the metropole. Nor is it an attempt at narrating the experience of the colony within the larger confines of empire-building. The account that I have written is an attempt at situating the colonial experience within the confines of an ambivalent narrative, which ponders both on the ideological materialization of the colonial intervention and its emotive and intimate content. It is a way of 'provincializing Europe' (Chakrabarty, 2000), by grappling with the affective valence of the colonial experience within the confines of the ideological ramifications of its expansionist initiatives. It is by comprehending the meaning of this paradox that I believe we can grasp the postcolony.

India, as a postcolonial entity for over half a century, is yet to come to terms with its colonial past. The struggle to negate the colony in the midst of the postcolony has not been successful, especially in the context

of its colonial heritage. The names of streets and cities have been changed; imperial icons have been mutilated and abandoned in zoos. But these have been cosmetic attempts and have made at best a superficial impact at obliterating the past. Colonial monumental architecture has remained the same; only its hegemonic symbolism has shifted from representing the ideology of the British Raj to the Indian nation state. In this context, the Park Street cemetery is an anomaly, an idiosyncratic monument whose symbolic meaning has been muted, and its physical edifice forgotten, but it still remains firmly rooted in the cityscape of postcolonial Calcutta. Perhaps, in its ambivalence, is located both the triumph of its survival and the source of its final demise.

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Notes

1. The Park Street complex consisted of three cemeteries – South Park Street cemetery with North Park Street cemetery (450 tombs); French or Tiretta cemetery opened in 1796, (107 tombs); and the Lower Circular Road cemetery which was the last to be opened and is still in use (IOOR R/4/80; File 10/2). The North Park Street cemetery was leveled in the 1950s and the French cemetery was cleared to make way for a school in 1977 (BACSA, 1983).
2. The average life expectancy of Europeans in India during the early colonial period, excluding infant and child mortality was well under 30 for men and 25 for women. Most of the deaths occurred during the monsoon months. Wilkinson notes: 'In Calcutta in one year, out of the total 1200, over a third died between August and end of December. It was a regular annual occurrence: the survivors used to hold thanksgiving banquets towards the end of October to celebrate the deliverance' (Wilkinson, 1976: 7). From 1690 to 1767, the St John's Churchyard was used as the principal burial ground for Christians in Calcutta.
3. The ordinary folks buried came from diverse professions, but they were all Europeans or their descendants. Some of the interesting professions mentioned in the epitaphs are: breeder of cattle, jail-keeper, silversmith, schoolteacher, architect, translator, livery, printer, head tide-waiter, park superintendent, cooper, postmaster, surgeon.
4. Some of the designs of the monuments seem to resemble those found in *A Treatise on Civil Architecture, London, 1759* by W. Chambers and *Architecture of Robert and James Adam London, 1778–1822* (Nilsson, 1968: 150).

5. Nowadays, most city dwellers do not remember that the North Park Street cemetery or the French cemetery ever existed, as a hospital and a school building have been built over them. The South Park Street cemetery is now simply known as the Park Street cemetery, a name that I have used throughout the article.
6. Calcutta Christian Board, a statutory body created by an Act in 1881, earlier maintained a total of seven cemeteries in Calcutta: North Park Street cemetery, South Park Street cemetery, Mission cemetery in Park Street, Lower Circular Road cemetery, Ekbalpur cemetery, French cemetery and Tollygunge cemetery (IOOR R/4/80; File 10/2).
7. The rescue excavation at Bethune College, Calcutta by West Bengal State Archaeology Directorate in 1997–98, and the excavation of the Clive House on the outskirts of Calcutta are a few examples of colonial archaeology in India.
8. In the 1990s, the politics of culturally appropriating the colonial landscape reached feverish heights with the renaming of the colonial cities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras to *Mumbai*, *Kolkata* and *Chennai* respectively. This was the logical conclusion to a practice that commenced soon after independence (see Nair, 1987). In Bombay, this movement is intimately linked with the rise of the ultra right wing political movements (Hansen, 2001). It is ironic to note that such postcolonial renaming has also erased the Hindi (national language) names of the cities (*Kalkata* for Calcutta and *Bambai* for Bombay), to give prominence to regional chauvinism.
9. It has been noted by one contemporary commentator that there are nearly 2 million European graves of the colonial period in India (Davies, 1985: 62).
10. The *Asiaticus* was compiled by John Hawkesworth who had also penned a couple of earlier books on the colonial history of the English in Bengal. The first part of the book was primarily a chronological and historical account of the English expansion, and the latter consisted of epitaphs. The *Oriental Obituary* was assembled by William Urquhart, whereas *The Complete Monumental Register* was compiled by Michael Derozario.
11. This is the primary discursive framework within which numerous 19th-century commentators on Calcutta locate the Park Street cemetery. For examples, see Cotton (1980[1909]: 462–78), Busteed (1897: 366–77), Hunter (1897: 11–62) and Blechyndess (1905: 129–54).

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