

**CORPSE POLITICS: DISPOSAL AND COMMEMORATION OF  
THE INDIAN INTERWAR DEAD, 1919-1939**

A Dissertation  
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Cornell University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

by  
Kelsey Jane Utne  
August 2022

© 2022 Kelsey Jane Utne

## **ABSTRACT**

**CORPSE POLITICS: DISPOSAL AND COMMEMORATION OF THE INDIAN INTERWAR DEAD, 1919-1939**

Kelsey Jane Utne

Cornell University 2022

Bridging necropolitics and critical heritage studies, this project constructs of transnational history of the British Indian dead. The project's approach reorients Eurocentric scholarship on memorialization and the dead by centering colonial subjects rather than colonizers. It explores how the materiality and commemoration of the dead altered physical, bureaucratic, and social landscapes in the decades between two world wars. During this period an emergent South Asian public challenged the colonial state over who possessed sovereignty over the living and the dead, and the management of corpses became grounds on which political and cultural authority was forged. The project argues that colonial era memorialization has been inextricably tangled with the power of the South Asian dead to manufacture political meaning and define communities.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Kelsey J. Utne is a prison educator, digital humanities scholar, and Assistant Professor of History at Arkansas Tech University.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Completing a PhD is a grueling and isolating experience in the best of times. A climate crisis, an unending racial reckoning, and two years into the coronavirus pandemic—these are not the best of times. But even before our current chaos, I never harbored any illusions about how many people it takes to arrive at such a milestone as this. The invisible labor and care work that girds a dissertation is immeasurable. Writing these acknowledgements feels an impossible task. Nonetheless, here I am. Any omissions are wholly accidental.

I am in the final throes of this dissertation only because of the generous support of a dissertation completion fellowship from the Mellon Foundation and the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), and before that the Cornell University Department of History. I conducted my research with the support of the American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS) Junior Research Fellowship and Social Science Research Council's International Dissertation Research Fellowship (SSRC-IDRF). Preliminary research was supported by the Cornell's Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies, Cornell University Graduate School, and the Social Science Research Council's Dissertation Proposal Development Program (SSRC-DPDP). The United States Educational Foundation (USIEF)'s Fulbright-Nehru Award made my first research trip to India possible exactly one decade ago.

For supporting my foreign language studies, I owe debts of gratitude to the American Institute of Pakistan Studies (AIPS), Berkeley Urdu Language Program in Pakistan (BULPIP), the U.S. Department of State's Critical Language Program (CLS), Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC), American Institute of

Indian Studies (AIIS), Cornell University's South Asia Program (SAP), University of Washington's South Asia Center and Middle East Center, and U.S. Department of Education's the Foreign Language and Area Studies Programs (FLAS).

I am indebted to these organizations and their staff.

I would be remiss to not acknowledge the librarians, archivists, and the institutions that made my research abroad possible: National Archives of India, Delhi State Archives, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, Uttar Pradesh State Archives in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh Regional State Archives in Varanasi, UK National Archives, British Library, and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives. In particular, I am immensely grateful to Rupam Kumari, Nur Sobers-Khan, Harendra Singh, Daniel Lowe, John O'Brien, Michael Erdman, Naomi Pink, and Andrew Fetherston.

Conducting research abroad gifted me the opportunity to connect with generous faculty who have helped me in my research, including: Ali Raza, Shabnum Tejani, Azmat Firdous, Ravi Singh, Janaki Nair, Nonica Datta, Radhika Singha, Chris Moffat, Kim Wagner, and John Parker. These same research trips would have been substantially poorer without the friendship of Sonu Agarwal, Sohini Pillai, Shubhda Chaudhary, Pooja Maheshwary, James and Jessica Pickett, Abeer Saha, Maria Hussain, Marc and Libby Reyes, James and Jessica Pickett, Deepika Purohit, Roy Bar Sadeh, Amal Shahid, Swati Chawla, and Aman Kant Panta.

I applied to complete my doctorate under Durba Ghosh because I admired her scholarship, but could not have known in advance how generous and creative a mentor she is. Throughout the last seven years she has held me to high standards. Under her

tutelage, I have grown as a scholar activist, and human being. Should I ever be lucky enough to advise graduate students, I aspire to emulate her model. I cannot imagine completing this project without Durba's guidance, patience, and steadfastness—let alone amidst a global pandemic. Thank you.

I am incalculably grateful to my minor committee members: Robert Travers, Eric Tagliacozzo, Chiara Formichi, and Mostafa Minawi. Robert's irreplaceable Persian translation sessions are only rivaled by his penchant for seeing potential connections across the literature. Eric has always been my cheerleader, as well as a source of inspiration for thinking globally. Well before they agreed to join my committee, Chiara and Mostafa supported my journey as a graduate student professionally, intellectually, and beyond. I am so grateful for their generosity as mentors, colleagues, and friends.

I am indebted to the Cornell faculty and staff who supported me, including Iftikhar Dadi, Esra Akcan, Marina Welker, Ernesto Bassi, Daniel Bass, James Nagy, Casey Schmitt, Yue Du, Derina Samuels, Kim Williams, Judy Yonkin, Claire Perez, and Barb Donnell. My time here spanned the tenure of multiple directors of graduate studies in the history department: Rachel Weis, Claudi Verhoeven, and Ray Craib. I am grateful that HIST7090 ensured I had the opportunity to learn from Paul Friedland and Larry Glickman. Thank you, Munther Younes, David Powers, Banu Ozer-Griffin, and Sujata Singh, for your generous language instruction. Auditing classes with Suman Seth and David Mimno were essential to my scholarly trajectory. I credit the CIVIC working group members (Aleksandr Mergold, Kelly King-O'Brien, Adam Smith, Lori Khatchadourian, Ben Anderson, and, of course, Durba) with helping me

think through and with heritage as an analytic. I am grateful to Aaron Sachs for HAW (Historians Are Writers), for constructive writing criticism, and for every time he opened his home up to our little writerly community. In the library, I thank Eliza Bettinger, Virginia Cole, Susette Newbury, Cass Wilkinson Saldaña, Michelle Paolillo, Heather Furnas, Robert Kotaska, Melanie Walsh, and Devin Sanera. Eliza and Virginia were more than merely patient with me; they encouraged and supported me at every turn. I would be remiss to omit the amazing folks at Cornell's Library Annex and Olin Library's Interlibrary Services Lending Unit. They are the unsung heroes of so many dissertations, and even more so in the era of Covid-19.

Thank you to my students at Auburn, Five Points, and Cayuga Correctional Facilities. You are the most invested and hard working students I have had the privilege of teaching. I am a better educator and intellectual because of you. In addition to my students, I am grateful to my colleagues and the administrators at the Cornell Prison Education Program past and present (Keisha Slaughter, Toni Murdough, Kyri Murdough, Tess Wheelright, Katie Stone, Alex Chertok, Jerome Dent, Rob Scott, Katie Stone, and Cathi Root); my teaching assistants (Alex Miller and Sarah Fassberg); and especially Betsye Violette and Molly Reed.

I could not have gotten through without the feedback, ranting, wandering, and community of my friends. Benedetta Carnaghi and Sam Wesner have been my rocks since the beginning. Our writing group with Mary Jane Dempsey and Ani Chen has been a bastion in the pandemic. I am grateful to so many fellow grad students and friends for a thousand reasons: Jessica Price, Shoshana Deutsh, Kevin Bloomfield, Lauren Jackson, Janelle Bourgeois, Rukmini Chakraborty, Andrew Amstutz, Osama

Siddiqui, Amanda Bosworth, Aparajita Majumdar, Juan Fernandez, Jacqueline Reynoso, Juan Fernandez, Kaitlin Pontzer, Emilio Ocampo, Lisa Lehner, Lara Frisko, Kiley Foster, Vincent Burgess, Yiyun Peng, Sean Cosgrove, Krithika Vachali, Anna Fore Waymack, Nick Myers, Nate Boling, Joe Giacomelli, Daniela Samur, Emilio Ocampo Eibenschutz, Nate Cruz, Jonathan Lohnes, Rebecca Harrison, Josh Savala, Chris Szabla, Marcos Cañizares, Sebastian Diaz Angel, Eric Epstein, and Yoon Choi.

The South Asia faculty, staff, and students at the University of Washington nurtured me as a baby graduate student. I grew as a scholar under the guidance of Purnima Dhavan, Anand Yang, Priti Rammurthy, Sunila Kale, Cabeiri Robinson, and Christian Novetzke. My foreign language skills grew in leaps and bounds under the irreplaceable instruction of Jameel Ahmad, Prem Pahlajrai, Amruta M. Chandekar, Shahrzad Shams, and Maryam Badiee. Finally, the South Asia Studies community was the most vibrant I have ever been a part of. An incomplete list of those intellectual trouble makers includes: Keith Snodgrass; Chris Diamond, Akanksha Misra, Rafeel Wasif, Nick Gottschall, Haroun Rahimi, and many more. Cabeiri (Persian homework partner) and Quinn Clark (Hindi homework partner and grad school bestie) deserve special recognition for being awesome on a dozen levels.

I aspire to pass forward all that my professors at Salem State University did for me. Thank you, Liz Blood, for never kicking me out of your office when ever I wandered in just to say hi (and for not being terrifying despite your name). Thank you Joanna Gonsalves and the SSU Honors Program for humoring a transfer student who needed a waiver to overload on courses and a grant to take a graduate course. The Political Science Department took me in as though I had always been there. I still

don't understand how that department does so much for its students with such a small department; Jennifer Jackman, Vanessa Ruget, Elizabeth Caughlin, Daniel Mulcare, Kanishkan Sathasivam, and Richard Levy are superheroes. Then there is the history department. Bethany Jay and Jaime Wilson modeled good history pedagogy before I knew what that was. Chris Mauriello and Alice Bianchi fostered a departmental space that students wanted to be a part of. Thank you, Drew Darien, for thinking it was a good idea to organize Phi Alpha Theta trips to regional and national meetings. Thank you, Brad Austin, for mentoring students not your own. Thank you, Dane Morrison, for always looking out for me—and, of course, for introducing me to Michele Louro. Finally, many thanks to my SSU ~~co-conspirators~~ friends with whom I worked on behalf of Amnesty International, Political Science Academy, History Student Association, Rotaract International, and other shenanigans, especially Rachel Kaye, Melissa Carella, Sean O'Brien, Vanessa Howard, Nikki Freeman, Jared Hopkins, and Will Caruana.

In all seriousness, I would not be here without Michele Louro. I took an independent study with her because my official advisor was going on sabbatical. In the course of two years I went from not knowing the first thing about South Asian history to imagining a lifetime pursuing it. Michele convinced me to apply for a Fulbright grant when no student from my university had ever gotten one before. I had never in my wildest dreams contemplated pursuing a doctorate. I had no idea what the process looked like and assumed it was not a path open to someone like me. Thank goodness Michele convinced me otherwise.

I owe an impossible debt to my friends, especially in Lindall and the Hollow and my families, both those in my life by choice and by blood. You know who you are. Thank you so much for my parents, Tor and Andrea Utne, for turning me into an accidental researcher. And finally, I absolutely could not have survived this process without Karl and Peach's enduring support.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	iv
	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
	TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	xii
	Figures.....	xiii
	Maps.....	xiv
	Preface.....	xv
<b>0.</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
	The Dead in South Asia .....	7
	Legacies.....	17
<b>1.</b>	<b>The Body of Raje Ram.....</b>	<b>24</b>
	The 48 <sup>th</sup> Pioneers.....	28
	Documenting Death.....	36
	Missing & “Missing” .....	56
<b>2.</b>	<b>Bodies of Control.....</b>	<b>73</b>
	(Non)Existing Statutes .....	80
	“Forfeit to the law”.....	85
	Jail Manuals .....	92
<b>3.</b>	<b>The Remains Abroad .....</b>	<b>113</b>
	Elites.....	116
	Migrants .....	132
<b>4.</b>	<b>Commemorative Constituencies .....</b>	<b>141</b>
	Hindu Burial.....	146
	Zoroastrian Cemeteries .....	157
	Municipal Governance .....	166
	Irwin Hospital.....	181
<b>5.</b>	<b>Necrogeographic Alternatives.....</b>	<b>188</b>
	Assassination.....	188
	Prosecution.....	200
	Execution.....	212
	Inhumation .....	219
	Intersection.....	232
<b>6.</b>	<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>237</b>
	Bibliography.....	249

## Figures

Figure 0.1: Aerial view of Delhi cremation grounds at night.....	xx
Figure 0.2: Photograph of shroud wrapped bodies in an ambulance .....	xxiii
Figure 0.3: Photograph of plastic wrapped bodies awaiting cremation .....	xxiii
Figure 0.4: Postcard titled “Massacre Ghat, Cawnpore,” .....	15
Figure 1.5: Photographs documenting the cremation of Sepoy Partab Singh .....	40
Figure 2.6: Chronology of 18 <sup>th</sup> and 19 <sup>th</sup> century legal milestones .....	90
Figure 2.7: Corpse disposal decision tree for Punjab Province Prisons .....	106
Figure 2.8: Corpse disposal decision tree for Madras Presidency.....	108
Figure 3.9: Chronology of Rampur nawabs’ deaths.....	115
Figure 3.10: Layout of the tomb of Imam Ali in Najaf .....	118
Figure 4.11: Photograph of New Lucky Restaurant in Ahmedabad with graves.....	144
Figure 4.12: German advertisement trade card “ <i>Die Türme des Schweigens</i> ”.....	159
Figure 4.13: Side-view of path to Parsi burial ground .....	165
Figure 4.14: <i>Masauda Ishtahar</i> (translation: Draft Notification), February 25, 1913	169
Figure 4.15: Photograph of Muslims protesting disrupted of graves in Delhi .....	181
Figure 4.16: Photograph of Muslims posing on the ruins of a Delhi tomb. ....	184
Figure 5.17: Photograph of Shraddhanand’s funeral procession.....	233

## Maps

Map 0.1: Graphic itinerary for 12-day Indian Mutiny Battlefield Tour.....	16
Map 1.2: CWGC memorials to British Commonwealth WWI casualties.....	27
Map 1.3: Necrogeography of Sepoy Partab Singh .....	42
Map 1.4: Basra War Cemetery .....	44
Map 1.5: Plot III of Basra War Cemetery and Indian Forces Cemetery .....	45
Map 3.6: Princely State of Rampur with locations of Hamid Ali’s predecessors .....	115
Map 3.7: Wadi al-Salam, Shrine of Ali, and Najaf Old City .....	117
Map 4.8 Land to be acquired at Shah Maroof in Gorakhpur.....	179
Map 4.9: Proposed footprint of Irwin Hospital .....	186
Map 5.10: Route of Swami Shraddhanand’s funeral.....	190
Map 5.11: Route from Delhi jail to designated cemetery .....	217
Map 5.12: Map of New and Old Delhi.....	220
Map 5.13: Location of armored cars .....	221
Map 5.14: Route of impromptu funeral.....	224
Map 6.15: Events leading up to Siddiqui's death .....	239
Map 6.16: Spin Boldak.....	240

## Preface

Early in the Covid-19 pandemic, a damning report from *Dainik Bhaskar* alleged that the Indian government was grossly misrepresenting pandemic deaths in the nation's capital. According to the official dashboard, Delhi had only 68 coronavirus deaths as of May 9, 2020.<sup>1</sup> However, the Hindi-language daily paper contrasted the official tally with actual burials and cremations carried out under coronavirus protocols at two cremation grounds and one cemetery in the city. Municipal committee members reported that the cremation ground at Nigambodh Ghat had incinerated 225 Hindus who had died of Covid-19; Punjabi Bagh Shamshan Ghat had carried out another 153 Covid cremations “*Hindu niiti se*” (meaning “in the Hindu way”). Meanwhile, Jadid Qabristan Ahle Islam, Delhi's largest cemetery had buried 89 Muslims who had died from Covid since the start of the pandemic—only three of which had occurred the day prior to the *Dainik Bhaskar* report.<sup>2</sup> Coronavirus corpses laid to rest at those three locations totaled 314—four times the total pandemic deaths Delhi officials reported at the time. Since then, journalists and public health officials have continued to raise concerns about the veracity of India's pandemic casualty numbers.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> “Delhi Fights Corona,” accessed May 10, 2020, <https://delhifightscorona.in/>.

<sup>2</sup> “शमशान और कब्रिस्तान में अब तक 300 से अधिक डेडबॉडी पहुंची, सरकारी रिकार्ड में सिर्फ 68 मौतें,” *Dainik Bhaskar*, May 10, 2020, <https://epaper.bhaskar.com/detail/359253/51808495553/cph/10052020/194/image>.

<sup>3</sup> Patralekha Chatterjee, “Is India Missing COVID-19 Deaths?,” *Lancet* 396, no. 10252 (September 5, 2020): 657; Priyanka Pulla, “‘The Epidemic Is Growing Very Rapidly’: Indian Government Adviser Fears Coronavirus Crisis Will Worsen,” *Nature* 583 (June 26, 2020): 180; Milan Sharma, “Coronavirus: Is Delhi Govt Hiding Covid-19 Death Data?,” *India Today*, May 10, 2020, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/coronavirus-delhi-death-toll-cases-hospitals-arvind-kejriwal-1676411-2020-05-10>.

Less than a year later, India was in crisis. Relatively low infection rates had puzzled international observers and fueled a false sense of triumph among India politicians.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, these circumstances fostered complacency among some, which by late April 2021 gave way record breaking infection rates. Heartbreaking accounts of patients dying (when facilities' oxygen supplies ran out) accompanied vivid photographs of Delhi cremation grounds unable to cope with the unending arrival of new bodies. The country broke the world record for daily infections, only to break that new record again and again. By early May 2021, Indian officials reported over 4,000 deaths a day and approximately 400,000 new infections a day.<sup>5</sup> Despite those grim numbers, some international observers remained skeptical.<sup>6</sup> They argued that India's infection and casualty rates only shocked outsiders because of the country's massive population. After all, India's 1.3 billion people accounted for around a fifth of the entire world population.<sup>7</sup> Taken at face value, India's official

---

<sup>4</sup> Siddhartha Mukherjee, "Why Does the Pandemic Seem to Be Hitting Some Countries Harder Than Others?," *New Yorker*, February 22, 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/03/01/why-does-the-pandemic-seem-to-be-hitting-some-countries-harder-than-others>; Eric Bellman, "Covid-19 Was Consuming India, Until Nearly Everyone Started Wearing Masks," *Wall Street Journal*, December 30, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-was-consuming-india-until-nearly-everyone-started-wearing-masks-11609329603>; Joanna Slater and Niha Masih, "India's Coronavirus Puzzle: Why Case Numbers Are Plummeting," *Washington Post*, February 4, 2021, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/india-coronavirus-cases/2021/02/04/d7f92f72-6562-11eb-bab8-707f8769d785\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/india-coronavirus-cases/2021/02/04/d7f92f72-6562-11eb-bab8-707f8769d785_story.html); Himanshu Shekhar Mishra, "India Beat All Odds In Coronavirus Fight, Says PM Modi," NDTV.com, January 28, 2021, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/there-will-be-more-made-in-india-vaccines-soon-says-pm-modi-2359470>.

<sup>5</sup> "कोरोना देश में: 25 दिन में रोज जान गंवाने वाले मरीजों की संख्या 1 हजार से 4 हजार हुई; 24 घंटे में 4.1 लाख नए संक्रमित मिले, रिकॉर्ड 4191 मौतें," *Dainik Bhaskar*, May 7, 2021, sec. National, <https://www.bhaskar.com/national/news/coronavirus-outbreak-india-cases-new-corona-strain-vaccination-live-updates-07-may-2021-128471785.html>.

<sup>6</sup> DamoT, "@newscomauHQ Cut the Crap BS Hype. India Isn't 'Ravaged'. Per Capita It Has Less than What Happened in Parts of Europe, US and the UK.," Tweet, @Damo\_\_T, May 11, 2021, [https://twitter.com/Damo\\_\\_T/status/1392002175950233601](https://twitter.com/Damo__T/status/1392002175950233601).

<sup>7</sup> World Bank, "Population, Total - India | Data," The World Bank Group, accessed June 17, 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=IN>.

coronavirus metrics compared favorably to other countries in relation to population size.

Comparing casualties by percentage of the population, skeptics suggested that, despite media “handwringing,” rates of infection and death in India were still a fraction of the pandemic’s peak in the US and UK.<sup>8</sup> Commentators from Poland, Ireland, Canada, United Kingdom, United States, and even within India itself cited digital Covid-19 tracking dashboards from the *New York Times* and John Hopkins. During a prior surge, the United States had already witnessed more than 5,000 deaths in a single day. The John Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center maintained a regularly updated list ranking the twenty countries “currently most affected by COVID-19 worldwide” by coronavirus deaths per 100,000 people.<sup>9</sup> Near the bottom of the list sat India, with a little shy of 28 deaths per 100,000 people. Meanwhile, the United States ranked fifth with 183 deaths per 100,000 people. By these metrics, in 2021 someone in the US was more than six times as likely to die of coronavirus than

---

<sup>8</sup> Gilet Jayne, “Is Anyone Else Listening to the News Channels Handwringing over India Covid Deaths and Remembering the UK Death Rate per Population Is 10x Higher than India. That’s Propaganda Folks.,” Tweet, @JayneEdwards2, May 1, 2021, <https://twitter.com/JayneEdwards2/status/1388316728699068417>; Yo Gamma Gamma The Infrastructure Flufferbot, “@CassandraTSLAQ Also Notable, despite the Fact That India Is Having Problems with the New Variant, Their per Capita Infection Rate Is Still Less than Half the US Peak This Winter.,” Tweet, @Flufferbot2, May 13, 2021, <https://twitter.com/Flufferbot2/status/1392851171501477890>; Dan Chesler, “@steve\_hanke Are You Familiar with <https://t.co/Uub7pkC8oA>. It Shows India Is Currently Ranked 110th in Deaths per Capita (116/M) from Covid. The US Meanwhile Is Ranked 18th at 1,786/M. Looks like India Has a Long Ways to Go Just to Catch up to the US.,” Tweet, @DanChesler, May 6, 2021, <https://twitter.com/DanChesler/status/1390455956580995072>; David, “@mickey\_blue\_66 @JamesMelville Suits Their Narrative, to Put It in Perspective, Sad Though It Is:- COVID DEATHS: United States: 174.02 per 100,000 People. United Kingdom: 190.98 per 100,000 People India: 13.87 per 100,000 People As of 4/23/21/ <https://t.co/89NqcWVvoD>,” Tweet, @David71187149, April 24, 2021, <https://twitter.com/David71187149/status/1386019551997947907>.

<sup>9</sup> “Mortality Analyses,” Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, accessed June 17, 2021, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality>.

someone in India. Given that the population of India is more than four times that of the United States, were things truly so dire on the subcontinent? Or was the pandemic's severity in India roughly a quarter as bad as what Americans had already suffered? Public health experts rebutted, citing the well-established unreliability of India's official infection and death rates.

It was in this context that Ashish Jha hypothesized that India's true daily death toll exceeded 25,000 Covid-19 deaths per day in spring 2021.<sup>10</sup> Like many members of the diaspora, Jha watched from afar as the pandemic wrought havoc on the country he had emigrated from decades earlier. He was a part of a South Asian community that is simultaneously global in nature and rooted in a specific geography. In a brief Twitter thread, Jha explained how he reached this conclusion with his usual concision. Before the pandemic, Jha noted, an average of 27,000 Indians died daily. Four thousand excess deaths a day (spread out across the whole country) should not have been capable of crippling the country's existing infrastructure for corpse disposal. Nonetheless, crematoriums throughout India reported between double and quadruple the number of bodies arriving for incineration. Jha ended the thread with an aphorism from his field. He tweeted:

There's an old saying in global public health  
You can ignore, fail to test for, or undercount whatever disease you want  
But you can't ignore the dead  
In India, the dead are telling us the disease is much worse than the official  
statistics  
And we have to listen

---

<sup>10</sup> As a medical doctor and Dean of Brown University's School of Public Health, Jha had become a coronavirus coverage fixture with media outlets in the US and abroad, for whom he consistently distilled the dangers and developments of Covid-19 down to the essentials clearly and calmly. In 2022 he became the White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator.

Fin<sup>11</sup>

It is worth pausing here to think about *why* Jha believed that you cannot ignore the dead. He did not reference citizens' demands for accountability or the collective experiences of mourning, both of which characterized public discourse in India at that moment. Nor did Jha suggest that the inherent value each individual life and the grief of each family rendered the dead "unignorable." He cited neither economic, political, nor demographic changes the country could experience as a consequence of this massive loss of life. Rather, Jha's argument relied on the materiality of the dead. Incapable of disposing of themselves, the dead had given the lie to the official picture of the pandemic in India in mid-2021. By existing at scale, the dead demanded ground in which to be buried, fuel with which to be burned.

The amount of fuel necessary to reduce a body to ashes varies based on weight. The funeral pyre for the average adult requires between 660 and 880 pounds of wood, the primary fuel source for cremations in India.<sup>12</sup> The rapid rise of Covid-19 deaths led to fuel shortages throughout the country. In less than a month, Delhi's historic Nigambodh Ghat performed over 2,500 cremations. Of those, over 80% (2,099) were "wood-based" cremations. Total wood consumption: 1,763,698 pounds.<sup>13</sup> Some Indian municipalities had previously dabbled with using cow dung logs to either supplement

---

<sup>11</sup> Ashish K. Jha, "There's an Old Saying in Global Health You Can Ignore, Fail to Test for, or Undercount Whatever Disease You Want But You Can't Ignore the Dead In India, the Dead Are Telling Us the Disease Is Much Worse than the Official Statistics And We Have to Listen Fin," *Tweet, Twitter*, May 9, 2021, <https://twitter.com/ashishkjha/status/1391238140166279169>.

<sup>12</sup> Technically cremators reported their average fuel consumption as 3-4 quintals of wood per pyre. Sometimes also called a hundredweight or centner, a quintal is a measurement of mass equivalent to 100 kilograms or approximately 220 pounds.

<sup>13</sup> Paras Singh, "Delhi: Pushed to the Limit, Crematoria Staring at Acute Wood Shortage," *Times of India*, April 28, 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/pushed-to-the-limit-crematoria-staring-at-acute-wood-shortage/articleshow/82282020.cms>.

or replace wood for cremation pyres, but now the pressure to find alternative fuel sources intensified.<sup>14</sup>



Figure 0.1: Aerial view of Delhi cremation grounds at night. Drone photography by Reuters photojournalist Danish Siddiqui.<sup>15</sup>

Municipal leaders pleaded with forestry services to bridge the gap. In Delhi officials cut down trees and sent wood from Raj Ghat, the memorial complex that includes the national memorial at Gandhi’s cremation site.<sup>16</sup> In Haryana State the

---

<sup>14</sup> Abhinav Sahay, “Lucknow Municipality Mulls Using 30% Cow Dung Cakes for Cremation,” *Hindustan Times*, August 26, 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/lucknow-municipality-mulls-using-30-cow-dung-cakes-for-cremation/story-17CxnS8xOfkNUVegO7lygI.html>; “Attaining Salvation: South Delhi Civic Body Approves Usage of Cow-Dung Cakes For Cremation,” *India.Com*, December 26, 2020, <https://www.india.com/news/india/attaining-moksha-south-delhi-civic-body-approves-usage-of-cow-dung-cakes-for-cremation-4291432/>.

<sup>15</sup> Photograph taken from drone footage by Danish Siddiqui for Reuters, April 21, 2021, <https://static.reuters.com/resources/r/?m=02&d=20210423&t=2&i=1559608757&r=LYNXMPEH3M01M&w=640>

<sup>16</sup> Chitleen K. Sethi, “Haryana’s Crematoria Need More Wood, so Govt Allows Forest Dept to Continue Tree-Felling,” *ThePrint*, May 10, 2021, <https://theprint.in/india/governance/haryanas-crematoria-need-more-wood-so-govt-allows-forest-dept-to-continue-tree-felling/655893/>; Soumya Pillai, “Delhi’s Crematoriums Run out of Wood, Seek Forest Dept’s Help,” *Hindustan Times*, April 28, 2021,

unregulated open market led to price gouging and localized fuel shortages.<sup>17</sup> Electric and gas crematoriums fared little better. In order to keep pace with the onslaught of new dead, furnaces ran constantly. Machinery broke down and crematorium workers threatened to strike.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, weavers in north India struggled to keep up with increased demand for the funeral shrouds used by most Indians regardless of faith.<sup>19</sup> From fuel to shrouds, the material components of funerals were in short supply specifically because of the excess deaths resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic.

\* \* \*

Regardless of disposal method, officials at every level of government struggle to secure physical space for the dead and their last rites. For those bodies destined to lay within the earth, each new burial claims space of its own. Even when graves will ultimately be reused, nature must first take its course. In perfect conditions, it can take many years for a shrouded body to decay in soil. Reusing a grave spot too soon may require laying the second body atop the first—and thus less deeply within the earth. At the start of the pandemic, Delhi’s Jadid Qabristan Ahle Islam set aside first three acres, then five acres for coronavirus victims out of the cemetery’s total forty-five

---

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/delhi-news/delhis-crematoriums-run-out-of-wood-see-forest-dept-s-help-101619559472773.html>; Damini Nath, “Gandhi Memorial Sends Wood to Cremation Grounds in Delhi,” *The Hindu*, April 30, 2021, sec. Delhi,

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/gandhi-memorial-sends-wood-to-cremation-grounds-in-delhi/article34453028.ece>.

<sup>17</sup> Ravinder Saini, “Packed, Rohtak Crematoriums Face Wood Crunch,” *Tribune*, April 29, 2021, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/haryana/packed-rohtak-crematoriums-face-wood-crunch-246144>.

<sup>18</sup> Saurabh Trivedi, “Hindon Crematorium Struggles after E-Furnace Stops Working,” *Hindu*, April 20, 2021, sec. Delhi, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/hindon-crematorium-struggles-after-e-furnace-stops-working/article34362372.ece>.

<sup>19</sup> Deepak Kumar Jha, “Kafan Demand Rises by 30 Fold,” *Pioneer*, May 17, 2021, <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2021/page1/kafan-demand-rises-by-30-fold.html>.

acres. Barely a year after the pandemic began the ground keepers reported the reserved space was almost full.<sup>20</sup>

By contrast, a cremation pyre can be made ready for the next corpse within a day. However, it is an illusion that physical space does not constrain disposal capacity at established cremation sites. Open air pyres still require room to burn and space between each pyre for the laborers to tend each fire and light the next. During this coronavirus spike, public green spaces and parking lots became temporary cremation grounds. Under normal circumstances, thirty-eight pyres were more than sufficient for Delhi's Ghazipur crematorium. By late-April 2021, even with all thirty-eight pyres burning simultaneously the crematorium could not keep pace with the arrival of the newly dead. As one of the sites designated to receive bodies from area hospitals, the crematorium's staff closed off space in the parking lot to add an additional twenty pyres.<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere, cramped cremation grounds repurposed vacant lots and public parks.<sup>22</sup> While this manner of adaptive reuse worked to remedy the shortage of pyres, still more material limits burdened Indians trying to lay their dead to rest.

---

<sup>20</sup> Aarefa Johari and Vijayta Lalwani, "'Bodies after Bodies Are Coming': Death and Devastation in Delhi," *Scroll.In*, April 29, 2021, <https://scroll.in/article/993561/bodies-after-bodies-are-coming-death-and-devastation-in-delhi>.

<sup>21</sup> "Delhi: Cremation Ground Makes Space for 20 Pyres in Parking Lot," *Indian Express*, April 25, 2021, <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/delhi-cremation-ground-makes-space-for-20-pyres-in-parking-lot-7287690/>.

<sup>22</sup> Shah Nawaz Alam, "90 Bodies in One Day, Funerals at Parking Lot of Gurgaon Crematorium | Gurgaon News," *Times of India*, April 27, 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/gurgaon/90-bodies-in-one-day-funerals-at-parking-lot-of-gurgaon-crematorium/articleshow/82265746.cms>; "India's Covid Crisis: Delhi Crematoriums Forced to Build Makeshift Pyres," *Guardian*, April 28, 2021, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/28/india-covid-funeral-pyres-delhi-crematoriums-space>; Saurabh Trivedi, "Park Turned into Cremation Ground in Delhi," *Hindu*, April 26, 2021, sec. Delhi, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/park-turned-into-cremation-ground/article34409782.ece>.



Figure 0.2: Photograph of shroud wrapped bodies in an ambulance at the Kurukshetra crematorium in Jahangirpura, Surat.



Figure 0.3: Photograph of plastic wrapped bodies awaiting cremation. Khan Trust workers bring bodies into overflow storage area at the Ashwini Kumar crematorium in Surat.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Chahat Rana, “How Gujarat Is Undercounting Its COVID-19 Deaths,” *Caravan*, April 29, 2021, <https://caravanmagazine.in/health/how-gujarat-is-undercounting-its-covid19-deaths>. Photographs by Shahid Tantray..

A morbid queue formed at cremation grounds when all the pyres were already occupied. The dead waited with family at home, in the car, in an autorickshaw, while their loved ones searched for somewhere, anywhere that could allow them to perform last rites.<sup>24</sup> They waited in ambulances, at hospital morgues, on bare earth and curbsides, and in sheds normally used for storing excess wood.<sup>25</sup> Some cremation grounds combined multiple bodies on a single pyre. Others sent families away or closed their gates and posted signs saying “House Full.”<sup>26</sup> In mid-April 2021, journalists for the *Caravan* stood outside the Kurukshetra Crematorium in Jahangirpura, Surat, where they counted eight ambulances. Each ambulance bore between two and six bodies, waiting to be cremated.<sup>27</sup> On multiple occasions, no ambulances were available to transport bodies from hospitals. Indian news outlets reported on garbage trucks and carts filling the gap, ferrying the dead to cremation grounds in Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Bihar.<sup>28</sup> Of course that presumes that local hospitals were open. Away from urban

---

<sup>24</sup> Manika Raikwar Ahirwal, “What It Took To Cremate My Father In Delhi,” news, NDTV.com, May 10, 2021, <https://www.ndtv.com/blog/blog-what-it-took-to-cremate-my-father-in-delhi-2438818>.

<sup>25</sup> Tamaghna Banerjee, “Kolkata: Body Kept for 17 Hours in Flat, 12 Hours in Morgue during Crematorium Hunt,” *Times of India*, May 10, 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/body-kept-for-17-hrs-in-flat-12-hrs-in-morgue-during-crematorium-hunt/articleshow/82506958.cms>.

<sup>26</sup> Yagnesh Bharat Mehta, “Five Bodies Cremated on Single Pyre in Surat,” *Times of India*, April 16, 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/surat/five-bodies-cremated-on-single-pyre-in-surat/articleshow/82094745.cms>; Pallavi Singhal, “As Covid Deaths Mount, Panchkula Cremation Ground Turns Away 15 Grieving Families,” *Indian Express*, April 30, 2021, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/as-covid-deaths-mount-panchkula-cremation-ground-turns-away-15-grieving-families-7296174/>; Nagarjun Dwarakanath, “‘House Full’: As Bodies Pile up, out of Space Crematorium Closes Facility in Bengaluru,” *India Today*, May 3, 2021, <https://www.indiatoday.in/coronavirus-outbreak/story/house-full-covid-bodies-pile-up-out-of-space-crematorium-closes-facility-bengaluru-chamrajpet-1798368-2021-05-03>.

<sup>27</sup> Chahat Rana and Shahid Tantray, “How Gujarat Is Undercounting Its COVID-19 Deaths,” *Caravan*, April 29, 2021, <https://caravanmagazine.in/health/how-gujarat-is-undercounting-its-covid19-deaths>.

<sup>28</sup> “Body of COVID-19 Victim Carried to Crematorium in Garbage Vehicle; H.P. CM Orders Probe,” *Hindu*, April 29, 2021, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/body-of-covid-19-victim->

centers, resources were in shorter supply in rural communities. In Eastern UP, the government hospital temporarily closed entirely after multiple staff tested positive for Covid-19.<sup>29</sup>

\* \* \*

Dear Reader,

I never wanted to write about the pandemic. For most scholars, we want for others to see the inherent value in our research with the same clarity that we do. As a historian of modern South Asia, I always thought my work was relevant, I always wanted my work to be relevant. But as a historian of death and the dead, I never wanted my work to be *this* relevant. I had already been examining records about graveyard management, cremation ground regulations, and memorialization projects for close to a decade when the pandemic struck, but somehow it still felt exploitative to treat the ongoing tragedy as an intellectual opportunity. By spring 2021, merely keeping up with the news in India felt voyeuristic. At the same time, it felt more important than ever not to look away.

---

carried-to-crematorium-in-garbage-vehicle-hp-cm-orders-probe/article34440411.ece; Mohd Dilshad, "Woman's Body Ferried in Garbage Truck to Crematorium in UP's Shamli," *Times of India*, May 10, 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/meerut/womans-body-ferried-in-garbage-truck-to-crematorium-in-shamli/articleshow/82505407.cms>; Somak Adhikari, "3 Alleged COVID Patients Being Taken To Hospital In Garbage Truck. Former Andhra CM Is Appalled," *India Times*, August 3, 2020, <https://www.indiatimes.com/news/india/3-alleged-covid-19-patients-being-taken-to-hospital-in-garbage-truck-former-andhra-cm-is-appalled-519444.html>; Anurag Dwary, "Garbage Van Ferries Covid Patients' Bodies To Chhattisgarh Crematorium," NDTV, April 14, 2021, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/garbage-van-ferries-covid-patients-bodies-to-chhattisgarh-crematorium-2413842>; "Body of COVID-19 Victim Carried to Crematorium on Garbage Cart in Bihar, Probe Ordered," *Tribune India*, May 17, 2021, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/body-of-covid-19-victim-carried-to-crematorium-on-garbage-cart-in-bihar-probe-ordered-254130>.

<sup>29</sup> Sunil Kashyap, "उत्तर प्रदेश के हर गांव में कोरोना का कहर : घर-घर मौत, हर घर मातम," *Caravan*, May 8, 2021, <https://hindi.caravanmagazine.in/crime/up-rural-areas-facing-covid-crisis>.

Perhaps I was avoiding the inevitable. When an initial draft of an article I wrote for *Nursing Clio* in mid-2020 did not mention the pandemic, the editors prodded me to do so. They were right of course. The piece dealt with a community graveyard that stood in the way of building a much-needed hospital in 1930s New Delhi.<sup>30</sup> The material needs of the living and the dead seemed in direct opposition. In truth the sense of land scarcity was manufactured by a colonial government content to steamroll over the past. The case study, which I introduce in more detail in chapter four, raised important questions about the dignity of the sometimes anonymous dead, the ability of the departed to still “take up” physical space, and the relationship between human remains and public health built infrastructure. Whatever my proclivities for treading lightly given the sensitive nature of researching death and the dead, my draft’s omission to the Covid-19 pandemic was as awkward as it was obvious.

\* \* \*

I opened with the coronavirus crisis in India for two main reasons. First, the Covid-19 pandemic is a shared point of reference for us all on both local and global levels. We were all impacted, one way or another by the coronavirus. Whatever your personal lived experience during the pandemic, I am sorry for the losses you suffered, for the fear or grief you felt. In the early days there was an unspoken, shared understanding that the handling of the dead during the pandemic was both significant and newsworthy. Overflowing morgues, mass graves, and the unclaim(ed/able) dead

---

<sup>30</sup> Kelsey Utne, “Bodies in the Way: Delhi’s Dead and the Pressures of Space,” *Nursing Clio*, September 24, 2020, <https://nursingclio.org/2020/09/24/bodies-in-the-way-delhis-dead-and-the-pressures-of-space/>.

were regular daily news features from New York City to Tehran to Bergamo.<sup>31</sup> In places where deaths were grossly under counted (regardless of reason or intentionality), the material fact of the dead and the physical burdens they placed on society resisted government narratives. And in April and May of 2021, the world looked on in horror as circumstances in India escalated with unprecedented and deadly speed—which brings us to my second reason.

The immense quantity of deaths in India during the Delta-wave rendered visible the physical and bureaucratic infrastructure upon which disposal and commemoration of the dead has always relied in the modern era. In their vast numbers the dead accomplished this because they highlighted where infrastructure failed, where it collapsed. Administrative systems were either unwilling or incapable of keeping up with documentation and metrics. Bodies could not be disposed of quickly enough and families could not say goodbye or perform last rites as they might have only the year before, all of which exacerbated the grieving process. The specter of these possibilities instilled a sense of dread in many who had yet to experience them directly.

Implicit in pandemic news coverage was a fact both obvious and obscure: the dead cannot dispose of themselves. Their bodies will wait until the necessary resources become available. These resources include the intangible, such as time and human labor. But so often we also overlook the tangible prerequisites upon which we

---

<sup>31</sup> Alan Feuer and Andrea Salcedo, “New York City Deploys 45 Mobile Morgues as Virus Strains Funeral Homes,” *New York Times*, April 2, 2020; Erin Cunningham and Dalton Bennett, “Coronavirus Burial Pits in Iran so Vast That They’re Visible from Space,” *Washington Post*, March 12, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/world/iran-coronavirus-outbreak-graves/>; Angela Giuffrida and Lorenzo Tondo, “‘A Generation Has Died’: Italian Province Struggles to Bury Its Coronavirus Dead,” *Guardian*, March 19, 2020, sec. World news.

rely: physical space to burn or bury, equipment (cremation pyres and fuel; shovels and shrouds), roads and vehicles for transport, morgues for storage. Barring all the rest, eventually time alone will take its course.

True abandonment of the dead to the elements is rarely intentional in any modern society. Zoroastrian “Towers of Silence,” Tibetan sky burials, and platform burials by Nagas in Northeast India are all forms of externment wherein purposeful exposure to the elements occurs in tandem with material funeral practices and built infrastructure, whether monumental or minimal. Regardless of scale or disposal method, the physical resources are as relevant to questions of identity, politics, and power as are the more readily recognized intangible indicators—such as personal beliefs about the persistence of the human spirit after death or the words spoken at a funeral. The coronavirus pandemic lays bare the importance of the materiality of dead and their disposal. But how well do we understand the modern history of the death and the dead? And to what extent does a narrow demographic stand in as the human universal?

## **0. INTRODUCTION**

This is a history of the *South Asian* dead—not a history of the dead *in South Asia*.<sup>1</sup> Though a deceptively subtle linguistic distinction, the difference is significant. Early in my research, I had intended for this project to be geographically bounded, for it to be a history of the dead *in* South Asia during the colonial period. I quickly learned, however, that locating sources on the *South Asian dead in South Asia* was not nearly as easy a task as sources on the white, European, mostly British dead in South Asia. The white population in colonial India was minuscule. In spite of that fact (or perhaps because of it), colonial archives hold a disproportionate body of records relating to the burial of the British dead. This bureaucratic emphasis on bodies out of place, led me in turn to the global South Asian diaspora. Their minority status abroad drew administrative attention in a way it did not at home. By maintaining focus on the South Asian dead in the late colonial era, my research disrupts scholarly literature that undervalues black and brown bodies.

### ***Whose Dead Matter***

Scholars of the dead have focused on the mostly white, mostly Christian dead, rendering these subjects as embodying universal historical dynamics. French historian and Vichy supporter Philippe Ariès remains one of the foundational figures in the history of death. As a member of the *Annales* school, Ariès charted European society's relationship with death from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. He theorized

---

<sup>1</sup> Today when we refer to India, we reference the boundaries of the postcolonial state, excluding what is now Bangladesh and Pakistan. Prior to 1947, in practice India encompassed the geographies of all three postcolonial states. For this reason, I often use South Asia/n interchangeably with India/n as a constant reminder of the breadth of region and the impermanence of state boundaries. In truth, South Asia as a region also includes at a minimum Bhutan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Some specialists consider South Asia to also include either Afghanistan to the west or Burma to the east — sometimes both.

that over the centuries, death has become increasingly removed until, in the modern period, we have “furtively pushed [death] out of the world of familiar things.”<sup>2</sup> Thus death and the dead became increasingly distant, dramatic, and unmentionable. Social historians have long criticized Ariès’ narrative for, among other things, its failure to grapple with economic and demographic variables, and an over-reliance on idealized literary representations of death.<sup>3</sup> While his chronology remains resilient in disciplinary summations of the history of death, historians have increasingly used “Ariès more as a strawman, than as a model.”<sup>4</sup> But perhaps the most enduring legacy of his work has been the continued focus on the history of death and the dead in Western Europe and North America. Over the last fifty years scholars have authored dozens of monographs dedicated to the history of white death in modern Britain alone, and dozens more on death in the United States, with scant attention to the world beyond the anglophone sphere.<sup>5</sup>

More recently, scholars of African-American history and politics have produced groundbreaking scholarship on the history of death and mourning among enslaved people brought from Africa to the Americas and their descendants. Vincent Brown’s 2008 *The Reaper’s Garden* challenges the supposed decline in death’s

---

<sup>2</sup> Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974), 105.

<sup>3</sup> Joachim Whaley, “Introduction,” in *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death*, ed. Joachim Whaley (London: Europa, 1981), 1–14; Bruce Mazlish, “Reviewed Work: Western Attitudes toward Death,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 5, no. 4 (Spring 1975): 751–52.

<sup>4</sup> Sharon R. Kaufman, “Dying and Death,” in *Encyclopedia of Medical Anthropology*, ed. Carol R. Ember and Melvin Ember (Boston, MA: Springer, 2004), 244–52; Hannah Malone, “New Life in the Modern Cultural History of Death,” *The Historical Journal* 62, no. 3 (September 2019): 833–52.

<sup>5</sup> Over the last forty years, academic presses have published dozens of books on the history of death and the dead in English speaking countries. The first academic history on the history of the death and the dead in South Asia came out in 2021.

visibility in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Brown argues for a “mortuary politics” and demonstrates how “in Jamaican slave society, death held everyone’s attention. The omnipresence of corpses, mortuary commerce, and funeral rituals made death a vital subject of strife and debate.”<sup>6</sup> In lieu of Ariès, he draws more so from the work of anthropologist Katherine Verdery, whose book *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies* argued that the materiality of communist era corpses were integral to politics in the former Soviet block. Less clear, however, is how Brown conceives of the “mortuary politics” he examines as distinct from political theorist Achille Mbembé’s necropolitics.<sup>7</sup> Building on the conceptions of biopower and biopolitics by twentieth century intellectuals (such as Giorgio Agamben, Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, and Donna Haraway), in 2003 Mbembé introduced the neologisms of “necropolitics” and “necropower,” both of which denote management and control over death rather than over life—in particular over marginalized populations.<sup>8</sup> After almost twenty years, Mbembé’s call for us to rethink how necropolitics “reconfigure the relations among resistance, sacrifice, and terror” remains salient.<sup>9</sup> Brown’s and Mbembé’s scholarship from the aughts laid essential groundwork for examinations of death and the dead beyond white Europeans and North Americans. Building on their work, innovative scholars like Daina Ramey Berry and Shatema Threadcraft have critically examined

---

<sup>6</sup> Vincent Brown, *The Reaper’s Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Harvard University Press, 2008), 11.

<sup>7</sup> In a footnote, Brown suggests that readers see Mbembe “for a somewhat different approach to the politics of mortality.” Brown, 272 fn6.

<sup>8</sup> Excerpts from several of the relevant works by these theorists may be read together in *Biopolitics: A Reader* (Duke University Press, 2013), edited by Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze. See also, Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford University Press, 1998), 160-175.

<sup>9</sup> Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 39.

the intersectional politics of death and the dead among Black communities in the modern United States.<sup>10</sup> In particular, they have examined the complexities of how Black bodies have been valued.

Only in the last three years have scholarly monographs come out that focus on the modern histories of death and the dead in sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Medical historian David Arnold once observed that while conventional histories of South Asia conclude with military defeats or judicial sentencing the “real end” came in the form of cholera and tuberculosis and dysentery, followed by cremation or burial.<sup>11</sup> Twenty-five years later, Arnold himself wrote the first monograph to focus on the history of mortuary politics in South Asia.<sup>12</sup> That same year, John Parker’s examination of the Ghanaian dead similarly represents the first scholarly monograph by a historian on death on the African continent.<sup>13</sup> A year prior, in 2020, Trais Pearson demonstrated the role of death and the dead in negotiations over medicolegal boundaries and international trade in nineteenth century Bangkok, introduces what he calls a “forensic turn” in the history of Thailand.<sup>14</sup> In

---

<sup>10</sup> Daina Ramey Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017); Shatema Threadcraft, “North American Necropolitics and Gender: On #BlackLivesMatter and Black Femicide,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116, no. 3 (2017): 553–79.

<sup>11</sup> Arnold, “The Colonial Prison: Power, Knowledge and Penology in Nineteenth Century India,” in *Subaltern Studies VIII*, ed. D. Arnold & D. Hardiman (Oxford University Press, 1994), 168. Since the 1980s, Arnold has contributed more to the history of disease in South Asia any other single scholar of the last fifty years. His *Colonizing the Body* (1993) is essential reading in the history of colonial biopolitics.

<sup>12</sup> Arnold, *Burning the Dead: Hindu Nationhood and the Global Construction of Indian Tradition*, (2021). Ahead of this monograph, his 2016 article, “Burning Issues: Cremation and Incineration in Modern India,” in *NTM Zeitschrift Für Geschichte Der Wissenschaften, Technik Und Medizin* flew under the radar of most South Asianists.

<sup>13</sup> John Parker, *In My Time of Dying: A History of Death and the Dead in West Africa* (Princeton University Press, 2021).

<sup>14</sup> Trais Pearson, *Sovereign Necropolis: The Politics of Death in Semi-Colonial Siam* (Ithaca: Cornell

Middle East history, Shana Minkin made good on her own 2013 call for scholars to examine power and politics of the dead in the region's modern history.<sup>15</sup> The turn towards histories of death and the dead outside of the western hemisphere is an essential step in decolonizing history as a discipline, which has held up Christian, white, European experiences as universal.<sup>16</sup>

Whereas historians took the white dead seriously for decades, they largely failed to examine the black and brown dead in the same way. Thomas Laqueur argues that historians must attend to the power of the dead to shape modern society in his widely lauded *The Work of the Dead* (2015). Predominantly focused on the disposal and commemoration of human corpses in North American and Western Europe in the modern era, he synthesizes a vast body of extant secondary literature on funerals, cemeteries, and the dead in the western Hemisphere. Laqueur could accomplish this monumental feat in part because he has himself been publishing on this topic for forty years.<sup>17</sup> It is therefore all the more surprising that in such a comprehensive work, he engages Mbembé only once. In the middle of a page long footnote, Laqueur points to Mbembé's "Necropolitics" only in relation to better understand Hegel:

---

University Press, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> Minkin, *Imperial Bodies: Empire and Death in Alexandria, Egypt* (Stanford University Press, 2019). Minkin, "History from Six-feet Below: Death Studies and the Field of Modern Middle East History." Much has been written on pre-modern death on the Arabian Peninsula and the Middle East. Interested readers should begin with Halevi's *Muhammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society*, which includes comprehensive endnotes on the relevant scholarly literature.

<sup>16</sup> It is worth noting that these four books are by scholars at two opposite ends of the career spectrum. Emeritus professors at Warwick and a senior lecturer at SOAS respectively, Arnold and Parker are well established authorities in their fields with at least three prior monographs to their names. Meanwhile, Minkin and Pearson's contributions were first books based on their dissertations— and in turn were riskier enterprises. Given academia's reticence towards change, the scholars innovating in this area are either 1) professionally secure (and thus taking no real risk pursuing these projects) or 2) have staked their precarious professional careers on the field being receptive to unconventional ground.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Laqueur, "Bodies, Death, and Pauper Funerals," *Representations*, no. 1 (1983): 109–31.

Hegel's views on tombs follow from his more general account of how humans come into subjectivity through the confrontation with death—"the violence of negativity." On this, see Achille Mbembé, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 14, and 11–40 more generally.<sup>18</sup>

I do not draw attention to the near total absence of Mbembé in Laqueur's work as a condemnation of his scholarship or the individual publication. Rather, given the immense breadth of scholarship Laqueur integrates into the volume, I have found that *The Work of the Dead* serves as a surprisingly accurate analogue for the state of the field at large. For instance, the 2018 *Companion to the Anthropology of Death* fails to mention Hinduism or Hindus (who comprise over one billion people) once in its 500 pages.<sup>19</sup> A marginal improvement, in Douglas Davies' *Brief History of Death* (2005), Christians and Christianity warrant mention more than three times as frequently as Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Zoroastrians combined.<sup>20</sup>

Histories of death and the dead continue to center white bodies and white lives. In our current moment, perhaps this should not surprise us. We live in a world where asserting the inherent value of minority lives remains incendiary, where the insistence that #BlackLivesMatter provokes counterclaims that the BLM movement devalues and even threatens white lives. We might assume, therefore, that the corresponding undervaluing of the non-white dead should be expected. None of that means, however, that we ought to be content with the expected.

---

<sup>18</sup> Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead*, 578 fn14. This same footnote also includes the book's only reference to Enseng Ho's landmark book on Indian Ocean diasporic connectivity via the dead *The Graves of Tarim* (2006).

<sup>19</sup> Élisabeth Anstett, *A Companion to the Anthropology of Death* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2018).

<sup>20</sup> Douglas J. Davies, *Brief History of Death* (Blackwell, 2005).

## The Dead in South Asia

The imbalance of archival records reflects both the role of colonial officials as willing mediators for British families and the presumption that the white dead were indeed the government's business. Imperial citizens in Britain were able to secure the aid of colonial administrators regarding the disposal of loved ones who died in South Asia and the maintenance of corresponding commemorative sites—as in the case of Dr. Jane Gilmore-Cox of Glasgow, who appealed to the India Office in her efforts to first place a headstone, and then later remove a tree casting shadows on her sister's grave in Naini Tal.<sup>21</sup> Colonial officials were well equipped to render this manner of assistance since Christian churches and their corresponding burial grounds already fell under the auspices of the Government of India's Ecclesiastical Branch (which was, at various times, housed within the departments of Home, Education, and Commerce).<sup>22</sup>

While the nineteenth century *The Bengal Obituary* was privately published, government presses produced provincially organized lists of Christian grave and tomb inscriptions.<sup>23</sup> The latter publications echoed the formatting and content of

---

<sup>21</sup> Dr. Jane Gilmore-Cox to Under Secretary of State for India, May 8, 1912, File 3981, IOR/L/PJ/6/1042, British Library [hereafter BL].

<sup>22</sup> Ecclesiastical officials in India submitted regular returns to London, which detailed the births, baptisms, and burials of European Christians and, to a lesser extent Eurasian Christians. However, these records seldom included Indian converts to Christianity.

<sup>23</sup> On *The Bengal Obituary*, see Trev Lynn Broughton, "The Bengal Obituary: Reading and Writing Calcutta Graves in the Mid Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 15, no. 1 (April 2010): 39–59. For example, see: *List of European Tombs in the Cemeteries Attached to the Various Churches in the Nilgiri District* (Madras, 1905); Miles Irving, *A List of Inscriptions on Christian Tombs or Monuments in the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Kashmir, and Afghanistan Possessing Historical or Archaeological Interest* (Lahore, 1910); E. A. H. Blunt, *List of Inscriptions on Christian Tombs and Tablets of Historical Interest in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh* (Allahabad, 1911); Albert Gille, *A Record of the Inscriptions at the Catholic Church at Patna, Bihar and Orissa* (Patna, 1917); Olive S. Crofton, *List Of Inscriptions On Tombs Or Monuments In The Central Provinces And Berar* (Nagpur, 1932) and *List Of Inscriptions On Tombs Or Monuments In Rajputana & Central India* (Simla, 1934).

Archaeological Survey of India volumes detailing Hindu and Muslim sites of archaeological interest.<sup>24</sup> To this end, colonial officials leveraged their own dead to write the British Empire into South Asian heritage over the *longue durée*. With graves, tombs, and memorial markers to dead Brits literally embedded in Indian soil, these publications implied that in a short window of time British rule had left a mark comparable to any prior regimes in the region.

To an extent the colonial impulse to focus on their own dead in South Asia hinged on a medical fact: the risk of Europeans dying in India was high. Throughout much of the eighteenth century, the mortality rate among British East India Company men posted in Bengal surpassed fifty percent.<sup>25</sup> Deadly tropical diseases like malaria, and later nineteenth-century cholera epidemics wrought havoc on British soldiers in the region. The constant threat of death by disease became part of colonial discourse linking a hostile climate to the comparatively weak constitution of Europeans.<sup>26</sup> Through the monumentalizing of these masses of British dead, colonial officials mobilized their casualties as a “symbolic resource” by which they could frame the

---

<sup>24</sup> For example, see entries from Henry Hardy Cole, *Preservation of National Monuments, India (Delhi)* and *List Of Muhammadan And Hindu Monuments*, Vol. 1 (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Press, 1908).

<sup>25</sup> P. J Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes: The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century* (Clarendon Press, 1976), 218–19.

<sup>26</sup> Arnold, *Colonizing the Body* (University of California Press, 1993), 65. In terms of public health hazards facing Europeans, see Arnold’s “Deathscapes: India in an Age of Romanticism and Empire, 1800–1856,” and “Cholera and Colonialism in British India.” On cholera in the colony, see Harrison, Mark Harrison, “A Dreadful Scourge: Cholera in Early Nineteenth-Century India,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 2019, 1–52 and Mark Harrison, *Climates & Constitutions: Health, Race, Environment and British Imperialism in India, 1600-1850* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999). On malaria, see Roy, Rohan Deb Roy, *Malarial Subjects: Empire, Medicine and Nonhumans in British India, 1820–1909* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

resiliency of the British people within a narrative of imperial growth.<sup>27</sup> These bureaucratic and heritage making moves have shaped the scholarly landscape.

Historians of colonial India have written many articles on British cemeteries and graves in India, but precious few on Indian burial or cremation grounds. And why not? The traditional archives provide a trove of valuable sources on the first demographic, from which historians have learned about imperial logics and the construction of power via commemoration.<sup>28</sup> It quickly became apparent to me that, not only would I have to read “against the grain,” but that first I needed to dig differently and more deeply to find archival records that did not center the colonial experience.<sup>29</sup> I did not want my own work to replicate the out-sized dominance of the white dead in the historical record. I narrowed the parameters of my research, largely excluding the white, European dead. Instead, the Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Zoroastrian dead lay at the heart of inquiry.

I have identified three common threads running through historical scholarship that deals with South Asian dead in South Asia—even though (as of yet) few historians of the region directly engage death studies broadly or histories of the dead.

---

<sup>27</sup> Robert Travers, “Death and the Nabob: Imperialism and Commemoration in Eighteenth-Century India,” *Past & Present*, no. 196 (2007): 85 and 120.

<sup>28</sup> David Arnold, “Deathscapes: India in an Age of Romanticism and Empire, 1800–1856,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 26, no. 4 (December 4, 2004): 339–53; Rebecca M. Brown, “The Cemeteries And The Suburbs: Patna’s Challenges to the Colonial City in South Asia,” *Journal of Urban History* 29, no. 2 (January 2003): 151–72; Rebecca M. Brown, “Inscribing Colonial Monumentality: A Case Study of the 1763 Patna Massacre Memorial,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 65, no. 1 (2006): 91–113; Elizabeth Buettner, “Cemeteries, Public Memory and Raj Nostalgia in Postcolonial Britain and India,” *History and Memory* 18, no. 1 (2006); Broughton, “The Bengal Obituary”; Travers, “Death and the Nabob”; Buettner, “Cemeteries, Public Memory and Raj Nostalgia in Postcolonial Britain and India”; Partha Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power* (Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>29</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton University Press, 2009).

These categories, none of which are not mutually exclusive, are: 1) the European dead, 2) gendered deaths, and 3) mass casualty events. Having briefly discussed the first category (dead Europeans) above, I turn now to gendered deaths and mass casualty events together, because these are also the two primary exceptions to colonial disinterest with the South Asian dead in the archives.

### ***Gendered Deaths***

Europeans were enthralled by the spectacle of widow immolation in South Asia long before the advent of colonial rule in the region.<sup>30</sup> By the start of the sixteenth century their travelogues reliably described accounts of a Hindu man's funeral, at which his widow was to be burnt alive on the funereal pyre—sometimes with the added drama of a white man's intervention to save the Indian woman from her fate.<sup>31</sup> As both a practice and a person (the devoted wife), *sati* embodied all manner of European stereotypes about non-Christian, non-white peoples. In the eyes of British observers, *sati* represented the antiquity of Hindu culture, proof of civilizational stagnation, and justification for their enlightened paternalistic

---

<sup>30</sup> The scholarship on *sati* is extensive. In particular, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow Sacrifice," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, ed. Patrick Williams (Columbia University Press, 1994); Anand A. Yang, "Whose Sati?: Widow Burning in Early 19th Century India," *Journal of Women's History* 1, no. 2 (Fall 1989): 8–33; John Stratton Hawley, ed., *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse: The Burning of Wives in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Andrea Major, *Pious Flames: European Encounters with Sati, 1500–1830* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006); Aishwarya Lakshmi, "The Liminal Body: The Language of Pain and Symbolism Around Sati," *Feminist Review* 74, no. 1 (2003): 81–97; Ania Loomba, "Dead Women Tell No Tales: Issues of Female Subjectivity, Subaltern Agency and Tradition in Colonial and Post-Colonial Writings on Window Immolation in India," *History Workshop* 36, no. 1 (1993): 209–27.

<sup>31</sup> Dorothy Figueira, "Die Flambierte Frau: Sati in European Culture," in *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse: The Burning of Wives in India*, ed. John Stratton Hawley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 57.

intervention.<sup>32</sup> Christopher Bayly rightly describes the “British obsession with *sati*” as “boundless.” He captures the depth of their fascination in this contrast:

Thousands of pages of Parliamentary papers were given up to 4,000 immolations while the mortality of millions from disease and starvation was only mentioned incidentally—sometimes only because it tended indirectly to increase the number of widows performing the “horrid act.”<sup>33</sup>

Mundane deaths, such as from famine, neither captured the European imagination like *sati* did, nor did it support the beneficence of British rule. Worse still, those deaths might undermine their civilizational mission or indicate incompetent governance. Once colonial officials outlawed *sati* in British controlled territories in 1829, they launched a new campaign dedicated to eradicating female infanticide.

British officials perceived infant deaths as undermining their control over life and death within the colony. It was one thing if infant children died from starvation due to colonial mismanagement or exploitative taxation. As reflected by the above quote from Bayly, such deaths were eminently tolerable in the eyes of the state. The greater tragedy, according to British officials, was the elusion of the state, placing the infants “beyond the reach of that merciful law which had rescued so many.”<sup>34</sup> As Lata Mani and others have shown, these nineteenth-century debates over women’s bodies

---

<sup>32</sup> Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (University of Chicago Press, 2002); Antoinette M Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

<sup>33</sup> C. A Bayly, “From Ritual to Ceremony: Death Ritual and Society in Hindu North India since 1600,” in *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death*, ed. Joachim Whaley (London: Europa, 1981), 174.

<sup>34</sup> J Cave-Browne, *Indian Infanticide: Its Origin, Progress, and Suppression* (London: W. H. Allen, 1857), 4.

were not truly about the women or girls, nor about their deaths. Rather, women were the terrain for the debates about tradition, law, and the boundaries of state power.<sup>35</sup>

I further contend that these efforts went beyond the right of Indian girls or women to live. For colonial administrators, they were also arguments about who had the right to kill Indian women. We see this logic at work in the enforcement (and lack thereof) of anti-abortion laws. Even though the Indian Penal Code barred “most abortions,” British officials rarely brought charges in cases where the woman lived.<sup>36</sup> However, if the abortion killed the woman as well, then British officials levied criminal charges against the surviving participants. In the same vein, officials emphasized the gendered nature of *female* infanticide in India. Doing so enabled colonial officials to selectively target infanticide as a crime being committed by Indians, and specifically by Hindus, against girl children. All the while, official discourse ignored the infanticide of both boy and girl children in the British Isles.<sup>37</sup>

### ***Mass Casualty Events***

The racial power dynamics of the colonial state manifested in insidious ways, including the designation of who had the right to kill whom. Consider colonial examinations of the casualties born from colonial violence against non-white subjects

---

<sup>35</sup> For additional scholarship on women and the limits of public and private spheres in colonial South Asia, see Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001); Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>36</sup> Mitra Sharafi, “Abortion in South Asia, 1860–1947: A Medico-Legal History,” *Modern Asian Studies* 55, no. 2 (2021): 372.

<sup>37</sup> Daniel J.R. Grey, “Gender, Religion, and Infanticide in Colonial India, 1870—1906,” *Victorian Review* 37, no. 2 (2011): 109. For further analysis on female infanticide in colonial South Asia, see also Satadru Sen, “The Savage Family: Colonialism and Female Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century India,” *Journal of Women’s History* 14, no. 3 (2002): 53–79; Padma Anagol, “The Emergence of the Female Criminal in India: Infanticide and Survival under the Raj,” *History Workshop Journal*, no. 53 (2002): 73–93; R. K Saxena, *Social Reforms: Infanticide and Sati* (New Delhi: Trimurti Publications, 1975).

in comparison with acts of violence committed by non-white communities. State violence by colonial officials against colonized subject was construed as necessary to maintain law and order.<sup>38</sup> In contrast, South Asians, as the colonized, were *de facto* non-state actors. Their violence always transgressed against the state, no matter who was the true victim.

The Revolt of 1857 provides a clear lens into this juxtaposition.<sup>39</sup> The bloody conflict ended a century of colonization by a private corporation and inaugurated ninety years of crown rule.<sup>40</sup> Authors have scrutinized the failed attempt to wholly end British rule, naming it in turn a mutiny, a rebellion, a revolt, an uprising, a civil war, or a war for liberation.<sup>41</sup> Narratives of executions and massacres were central to comprehending 1857, particularly the threat of violence committed by Indians against the bodies of white women.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Here I draw from Weber's definition of a state in *Politics as Vocation*, though it is not without valid critiques. See for example Robert Bates, Avner Greif, and Smita Singh, "Organizing Violence," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2002. On the intents of state violence in colonial India see Kim A Wagner, "'Calculated to Strike Terror': The Amritsar Massacre and the Spectacle of Colonial Violence," *Past & Present* 233, no. 1 (November 2016): 185–225.

<sup>39</sup> The literature on 1857 is vast. In addition to sources cited in this section, see the (presently) six volume project "Mutiny at the Margins" headed by Crispin Bates See also Kim Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857: Rumours, Conspiracies and the Making of the Indian Uprising* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010); William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty: Delhi, 1857* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007); Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Spectre of Violence: The 1857 Kanpur Massacres* (Penguin Books, 2007).

<sup>40</sup> On the East India Company as a state-like force, see Philip J. Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>41</sup> For the politics of this terminology, see Syed Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi, "The Significance of the Different Names Applied by Historians to the Events of 1857," *Journal of Political Studies* 20, no. 1 (Summer 2013): 179–97; Jyotirmaya Sharma, "History as Revenge and Retaliation: Rereading Savarkar's 'The War of Independence of 1857,'" *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 19 (2007): 1717–19.

<sup>42</sup> Alison Blunt, "Embodying War: British Women and Domestic Defilement in the Indian 'Mutiny', 1857-8," *Journal of Historical Geography* 26, no. 3 (2000): 403–28; Nancy L Paxton, "Mobilizing Chivalry: Rape in British Novels about the Indian Uprising of 1857," *Victorian Studies* 36, no. 1 (1992); Stephen J. Heathorn, "Angel of Empire: The Cawnpore Memorial Well as a British Site of

The deaths of European civilians fit into a colonial discourse that framed massacres as very specific and politically expedient type of death, first deployed by the East India Company over two centuries earlier in Indonesia.<sup>43</sup> The widely publicized murder of captured British non-combatants at Cawnpore (present day Kanpur) provided grounds for the British to rationalize extreme retribution and over a century of commemorative efforts, from memorial committees to royally sponsored tours. The sites of British civilian deaths transformed into pilgrimage sites. By 1860, multiple monographs extolled the virtue and suffering of the mutiny's "martyrs."<sup>44</sup> Sites like the so-called "Massacre Ghat" in Cawnpore together formed a tourist circuit, complete with both official and unofficial guidebooks.<sup>45</sup> On the back of one early twentieth century postcard from Cawnpore (Figure 0.4), a visitor explained that they had thrice visited this "place where 'During the Mutiny' the women and children fled to make their escape but [were] cut to pieces by the rebels."<sup>46</sup> This single postcard reveals how in Cawnpore manifested a sort of trifecta of deaths worthy of bureaucratic (and in turn archival) attention: multiple casualties, many of whom were white, European women.

---

Imperial Remembrance," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 8, no. 3 (2008); Jenny Sharpe, "The Unspeakable Limits of Rape: Colonial Violence and Counter-Insurgency," *Genders*, no. 10 (March 1991): 25–46.

<sup>43</sup> See Alison Games' excellent *Inventing the English Massacre: Amboyna in History and Memory* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>44</sup> William Owen, *Memorials of Christian Martyrs: And Other Sufferers for the Truth in the Indian Rebellion* (London: Simkin, Marshall, & Co, 1859); Reverend Martin Meek, *The Martyr of Allahabad: Memorials of Ensign Arthur Marcus Hill Cheek, of the Sixth Native Bengal Infantry, Murdered by the Sepoys at Allahabad* (London: James Nisbet & Co, 1858).

<sup>45</sup> Manu Goswami, "'Englishness' on the Imperial Circuit: Mutiny Tours in Colonial South Asia," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 9, no. 1 (March 1, 1996): 54–84.

<sup>46</sup> Omar Khan, "Massacre Ghat, Cawnpore," Paper Jewels, accessed June 3, 2021, <https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/massacre-ghat-cawnpore-0>.



Figure 0.4: Postcard titled “Massacre Ghat, Cawnpore,” c.1905.<sup>47</sup>

British retaliation in the immediate aftermath showcased grotesque colonial violence, including forcing the Indian public to witness executions via cannon fire.<sup>48</sup> Before American photographers like Alexander Gardner immortalized casualties of the American Civil War, some of the earliest known photographs of corpses captured the artfully strewn remains of Indians who had rebelled against the British.<sup>49</sup> Felice Beato’s infamous photograph of exhumed Indian bones at Secundra Bagh and brief discussion thereof is a rare appearance of South Asians in Laqueur’s *The Work of the Dead*, in this case only to illustrate the potential of human remains to double as trophies.<sup>50</sup> The objectification of the Indian dead as trophies rather than subjects

---

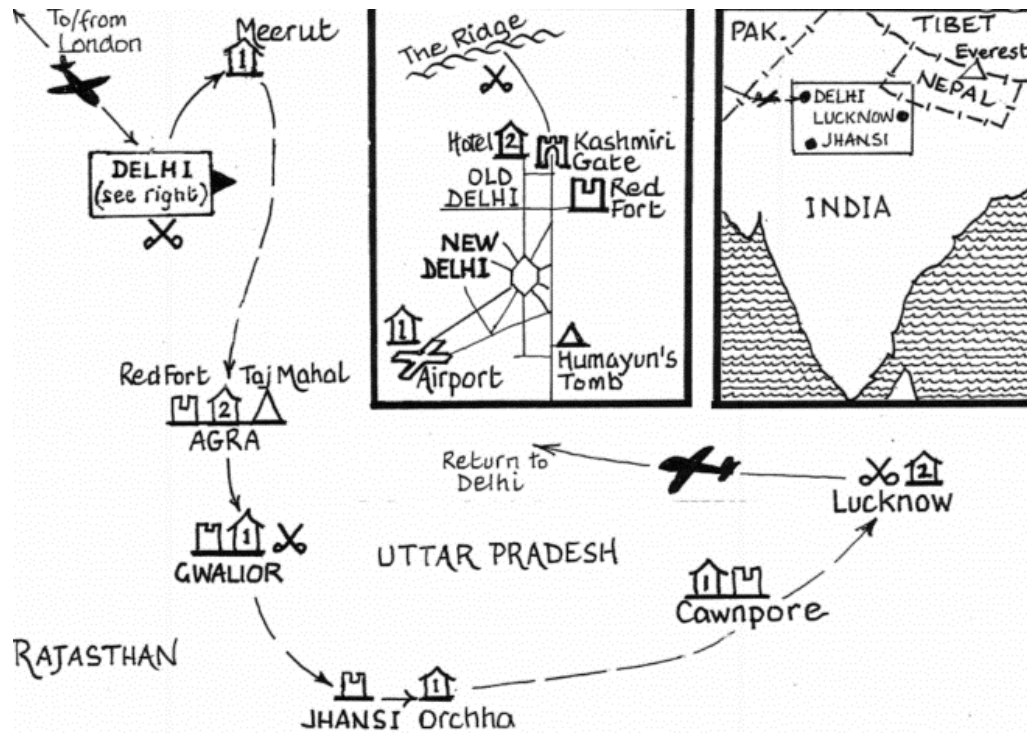
<sup>47</sup> Khan.

<sup>48</sup> Wagner, “‘Calculated to Strike Terror.’”

<sup>49</sup> See Zahid R Chaudhary, *Afterimage of Empire: Photography in Nineteenth-Century India* (University of Minnesota Press, 2012), especially chapter 2.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton University Press, 2015), 342–43.

themselves is even more effectively demonstrated in the way a British army captain quite literally brought home the skull of an executed Indian officer as souvenir.<sup>51</sup>



Map 0.1: Graphic itinerary for 12-day Indian Mutiny Battlefield Tour scheduled for November 2021 operated by UK based company.<sup>52</sup>

There was a paradoxical quality to deadly violence perpetrated by the colonized.<sup>53</sup> On the one hand, it served an imperial agenda. Officials enthusiastically cited communal violence (which broadly describes clashes between different religious, ethnic, or caste groups in South Asia) as justification for foreign occupation: the

<sup>51</sup> In contrast to Laqueur’s treatment, Wagner recently endeavored to unearth the story of Alum Bheg, to whom the skull belonged. See Kim Wagner, *The Skull of Alum Bheg: The Life and Death of a Rebel of 1857* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>52</sup> “12 Day Indian Mutiny Tour | Wake Up Call For The British,” The Cultural Experience, accessed June 3, 2021, <https://www.theculturalexperience.com/tours/the-indian-mutiny-battlefield-tour/>.

<sup>53</sup> Jill C. Bender, *The 1857 Indian Uprising and the British Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2016); Gautam Chakravarty, *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Mukherjee, *Spectre of Violence*; Andrew Ward, *Our Bones Are Scattered: The Cawnpore Massacres and The Indian Mutiny Of 1857* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1996).

British, so they claimed, were needed to govern over peoples not yet capable of peacefully governing themselves. Furthermore, colonial administrative decisions incentivized rivalry and competition between communities, which in turn reduced the likelihood of united opposition.<sup>54</sup> Still, even though far fewer people died in communal clashes than of mundane causes like disease or malnutrition, riots and the risk of riots loomed large in the colonial discourse. Everyday causes of death garnered substantial governmental attention only after atypical escalations. In epidemics, disease deaths became mass casualty events. Famine deaths subsumed malnutrition deaths on a grand scale.<sup>55</sup> As the coronavirus pandemic has made abundantly clear, catastrophic loss of life means that corpses accumulate and the dead refuse to be ignored.

### Legacies

These histories together form a sort of skeleton genealogy of death in the colonial archives, which has in turn impacted the scope of historical scholarship well beyond the colonial period. Demographically, British India's European dead have received vastly disproportionate scholarly attention from historians. From the beginning of the Company Raj period (1757) through to the end of the British colonial occupation (1947), white Europeans were always a fraction of the population. Unlike

---

<sup>54</sup> Scholars continue to debate the place of communalism in South Asian history and to what extent the British should be held responsible. For a classic comparison that continues to capture what is at stake, read alongside one another: C. A. Bayly, "The Pre-History of 'Communalism'? Religious Conflict in India, 1700–1860," *Modern Asian Studies* 19, no. 02 (1985); Romila Thapar, "Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity," *Modern Asian Studies* 23, no. 2 (1989): 209–31.

<sup>55</sup> On famine, see Janam Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal: War, Famine and the End of Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2015). See also Naresh Chandra Sourabh and Timo Myllyntaus, "Famines in Late Nineteenth-Century India: Politics, Culture, and Environmental Justice," *Environment & Society Portal*, July 28, 2015, <https://www.environmentandsociety.org/exhibitions/famines-india>.

the British colonies in North America or Australia, India was never a settler colony. In 1911, the combined European and Anglo-Indian population was less than 200,000 and represented less than 0.001% of the population of India.<sup>56</sup> Even Nepali immigrants, the largest immigrant community in the colony, outnumbered the combined European and Anglo-Indian population by more than 50,000.<sup>57</sup>

Notably, the single most traumatic period in the subcontinent's history also represents the closest historians have come to grappling with death and the dead in the region. While the Revolt of 1857 marked the beginning of British crown rule in India, even wider scale violence marked its conclusion. The Partition of 1947 overshadowed the establishment of two postcolonial, independent states. Majority Hindu India lay between the disconnected halves of Pakistan, with East Pakistan (present day Bangladesh) to one side and West Pakistan (today's Pakistan) on the other. The hasty British withdrawal accompanied mass migration, large scale communal violence, and an unknown number of deaths.<sup>58</sup>

Corpses—real and imagined, individual and collective—are embedded in both scholarship and literature of the 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan.<sup>59</sup> Most

---

<sup>56</sup> E.A. Gait, *India: Part 1. Report*, vol. 1, Census of India 1911 (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1913), 141–46.

<sup>57</sup> Gait, 1:97. In its simplest definition of the term, Anglo-Indian referred to individuals of mixed Indian and British ancestry. However, these racialized designations of the colonial state were often contingent on positions of privilege or lack thereof. See Elizabeth Buettner, "Problematic Spaces, Problematic Races: Defining 'Europeans' in Late Colonial India," *Women's History Review* 9, no. 2 (June 1, 2000): 277–98.

<sup>58</sup> Gyanendra Pandey, *Memory, History, and the Question of Violence: Reflections on the Reconstruction of Partition* (Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, 1999).

<sup>59</sup> Ilyas Chattha, *Partition and Locality: Violence, Migration, and Development in Gujranwala and Sialkot, 1947-1961* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 132–33; Navdip Kaur, "Violence and Migration: A Study of Killing in the Trains During the Partition of Punjab in 1947," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 72 (2011): 947–54.

hauntingly, they manifest in the form of “ghost trains” bearing the dead bodies across the new state border: murdered Hindus arriving in India, murdered Muslims arriving in Pakistan.<sup>60</sup> In his acclaimed novel *Train to Pakistan*, Khushwant Singh imagines the impact of these dead body laden trains on a fictional village near the new border. While in the presence of the corpses, the actual sight of them initially “produced a cold numbness” in one of the protagonists, District Magistrate Hukum Chand. The character becomes increasingly emotionless while supervising the physical labor required to gather and dispose of the remains of the ghost train victims. It was only later on, at a physical remove from the dead, that vivid images of bodies haunted Chand. He recalled the dead in relation to spaces: huddled in corners, in lavatories, on luggage racks amongst bedding.<sup>61</sup> Neither the actual dead nor the idea of them affected Chand so much as memories of their bodies in place.

Moving away from earlier quests for the origin of the violence, in recent decades scholars have re-conceived of Partition as a prolonged event and significant source of trauma.<sup>62</sup> Itself drawing on the rich literature on Holocaust memories and intergenerational trauma, Partition scholarship has in turn provided fertile ground for

---

<sup>60</sup> For ghost trains in the scholarly literature, see Chattha, *Partition and Locality*, 132–33; Kaur, “Violence and Migration,” 947–54.

<sup>61</sup> Khushwant Singh, *Train to Pakistan* (Grove Press, 1990), 84–85.

<sup>62</sup> Oral histories have been instrumental to understanding the lived experience of Partition. See especially Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (Kali for Women, 1998) and Anindya Raychaudhuri, *Narrating South Asian Partition: Oral History, Literature, Cinema*, (Oxford University Press, 2019). On Partition as a lengthy and agonizing process, see Yasmin Khan's *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*, (Yale University Press, 2007) and Zamindar's *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (Columbia University Press, 2007).

examination of a subsequent violent rupture on the subcontinent, the 1971 war for Bangladeshi independence from Pakistan.<sup>63</sup>

Urvashi Butalia's oral history compilation, *The Other Side of Silence*, further proves that the dead need not be recent. One of Butalia's interlocutors explains how, in the immediate aftermath of Partition, she and other social workers had set up a charity home for abducted Hindu women on a Muslim graveyard: "on the bodies of the dead, we built the lives of women."<sup>64</sup> Butalia reflected on this change in political authority and its effects on citizenship as the new postcolonial (and Hindu majority) Indian state re-purposed a Muslim burial ground. Whether histories of Partition or the Uprising of 1857, the Indian dead remain part of the background, a sort of semiotic shorthand to illustrate traumas that defy articulation or the brutal excess of colonial oppression.

The scholarship on commemoration in modern South Asia continues to relegate the study of memorials to exceptional losses as separate from more prosaic deaths. Perhaps it is our peculiar disciplinary preoccupation with moments of rupture and the motor of change. While certain deaths from wars or violent flash points "structure [the] nation's biography," some recent works have shown that they and their remembrances have always occurred within a wider context of social practices and

---

<sup>63</sup> Jonathan Daniel Greenberg, "Generations of Memory: Remembering Partition in India/Pakistan and Israel/Palestine," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, no. 1 (2005): 89–110; Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *Partition's Post-Amnesias: 1947, 1971 and Modern South Asia*, 2013; Nayanika Mookherjee, "'Never Again': Aesthetics of 'Genocidal' Cosmopolitanism and the Bangladesh Liberation War Museum," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17 (May 1, 2011): S71–91; Yasmin Saikia, *Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>64</sup> Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 129.

laws relating to death commemoration.<sup>65</sup> As the scholarship of memory and nationalism in South Asia has focused on symbolic moments of mass killing, it has missed the larger developing context of new forms of politics around dead bodies and their commemoration. By studying the late colonial period, I chose to root this project in the tumultuous decades of rising anticolonial resistance and the decline of imperial control. Despite the rich literature on the ways in which British colonialism infiltrated practically every aspect of living in South Asia during this period, the significance of the dead in shaping its politics remains poorly understood.

With sparse exception, the dead provide context for other histories, but they have as yet resisted contextualization.<sup>66</sup> Historian of West Africa, John Parker, put it best in 2018 when he and I compared the challenges of doing this sort of work in colonial Ghana and India: “The dead are at once everywhere and no where.” In this Parker captured the incongruity of the native dead appearing in practically every corner of colonial governance without ever being the focus of the archive or subsequent historical analysis. To understand the politics of commemoration in modern South Asia, I needed to piece together a fragmented history.

While the government dutifully documented European cemeteries and burials (regardless of denomination) in South Asia, no department or agency dealt with the

---

<sup>65</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 205; Yasmin Khan, “Performing Peace: Gandhi’s Assassination as a Critical Moment in the Consolidation of the Nehruvian State,” *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 57–80; Chris Moffat, “Bhagat Singh’s Corpse,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 39, no. 3 (2016): 644–61.

<sup>66</sup> One important exception is Janam Mukherjee’s *Hungry Bengal*, which looks closely at riot and famine casualties in 1940s Bengal—and pays particular attention to the handling of their corpses.

South Asian dead in the colonial period.<sup>67</sup> The demographics of death fell under the auspices of census officials, and causes of death manifested in vital statistic reports for education departments, under whose umbrella public health administration periodically fell. The unclaimed indigent South Asian dead arose as costs to be reluctantly born by municipal bodies locally and the foreign department when far afield. Burial and cremation grounds themselves most often only appear in the records as boundary disputes, overfull grounds requiring the purchase or lease of additional land, and the infrastructure planning for the Revenue and Agriculture Department, Public Works Department, and municipal bodies. The movement of bodies from the location of death to the location of disposal remained beneath the radar—unless they crossed borders. In those cases, the (re)location of ashes, bones, and whole corpses solicited the attention of administrators from several departments, including departments in charge of foreign relations, commerce, and railways. So too did bodies and their conditions require the attention of the Judicial Department (for murder inquiries, prison suicides, and executions) and various military bodies (mostly for casualties of combat, disease, and accidents). The materiality of the human corpse and its disposal underlies the presence of the dead across all these different records in one way or another.

---

<sup>67</sup> I specify “European” here rather than Christian, because these records pay little attention to Indian converts to Christianity... unless said Indian Christians were the spouses or children of white Europeans. However, even in those circumstances the inclusion of Indian women is not guaranteed. For example, see Durba Ghosh, “Decoding the Nameless: Gender, Subjectivity, and Historical Methodologies in Reading the Archives in Colonial India,” in *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840*, ed. Kathleen Wilson (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 297–316.

The following chapters reconstruct the history of the South Asian dead thematically, instead of chronologically. In the first four chapters, I spatialize and historicize corpse disposal and commemoration of the dead in different contexts. These thematic categories are the war dead, the criminal dead, the dead abroad, and the urban dead. In doing so, each chapter speaks to a scholarly discourse within which these dead and their postmortem fates normally appear only tangentially. The fifth and final chapter is a microhistory for which the preceding sections lay the stage. At the heart of each chapter lie the dead themselves and the dilemmas their disposal raises.

## 1. THE BODY OF RAJE RAM

Two different World War I memorials in two different countries commemorate Havildar Raje Ram's death: one in Mahpalpur, a tiny Delhi Province village; one in Basra, Iraq. Neither memorial mentions Raje Ram by name. Neither one marks where he died. The non-commissioned officer was one of over 70,000 service members from India known to have perished in World War I—half of whom died, not in the war's famed Western Front, but in the Mesopotamian campaign. According to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), the organization responsible for the majority of memorials to the British Empire's WWI and WWII dead, Raje Ram died on March 9, 1917.<sup>68</sup> Despite knowing *when* the havildar died, further details are sketchy. On the day he died, his regiment had a half holiday to celebrate Holi, a brief reprieve from their work building bridges and laying railway tracks fifty miles north of Baghdad.<sup>69</sup> The regimental war diary makes no mention of his death, nor indeed of anything in February or early March that could have resulted in his death.<sup>70</sup> It is possible he died in hospital at one of the casualty clearing stations elsewhere in Mesopotamia, where disease killed far more Indians than combat. Havildar Raje Ram is among the over 30,000 “missing” Indian dead commemorated at the Basra War Memorial for whom there is no known burial or cremation site. The question remains: What happened to Havildar Raje Ram's body?

---

<sup>68</sup> “Havildar Raje Ram | War Casualty Details,” Commonwealth War Graves Commission, accessed January 6, 2021, <https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/1683632/raje-ram/>.

<sup>69</sup> W. B. P. Tugwell, *History Of The Bombay Pioneers* (London: Sidney Press Limited, 1938), 297.

<sup>70</sup> March 9, 1917, War Diary for Divisional Troops: 48 Pioneers, WO 95/5189/7, UK National Archives at Kew [hereafter Kew].

In pursuit of this question, several more emerge. What happened to the South Asians who died fighting on behalf of the British Empire in World War I? What happened to their bodies? Where and how have they been remembered? How did an Empire, famous for its penchant for administrative minutiae, lose track of so many Indians who gave their lives in its service? And why does it matter?

The historiography of both the war and its aftermath are indicative of the broader chronic marginalization of the so-called Global South in historical narratives of war. In her landmark book *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, Drew Gilpin Faust argues that the scale of carnage in the American Civil War (1861-1865) embedded memorialization of the war dead in the nation's identity. She contextualizes the war's death toll, asserting that the American Civil War's 620,000 dead "would presage the slaughter of World War I's Western Front and the global carnage of the twentieth century."<sup>71</sup> To this day, the Civil War remains the deadliest conflict in American history. However, Faust's claim reifies the centrality of the West in histories of conflict. First, it wholly omits the existence of a contemporaneous civil war in Asia that was thirty times as deadly as the American Civil War. China's Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) claimed between 20 and 30 million people. Even though it was a lengthier conflict, it was a substantially deadlier episode on an annual basis. On average more than twice as many Chinese died per year in the Taiping Rebellion than Americans died in the entirety of the conflict in the United

---

<sup>71</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), xi.

States.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, Faust specifically locates the American Civil War in a genealogy with World War I's Western Front. No doubt the trenches of France and Belgium are both more familiar and closer geographically to many of her readers. Yet in doing so, Faust invites her audience to imagine the scale of lives lost in western Europe as more substantial and more significant, than the other theatres of war—a global trauma rendered as European trauma.

While the First World War claimed fewer lives than the Taiping Rebellion sixty years earlier, its geographic range was unprecedented. A tangled web of bilateral treaties and aggressive European colonial expansion of the 19th century together wrought a complex conflict with unparalleled geographic distribution of fighting, death, and memorials to the dead. It would not be outdone until the second world war. The British Empire alone buried or reburied 768,000 individuals, many of whose bodies and identities were no longer linked.<sup>73</sup> A further 336,000 bodies remain “missing” to this day. In the years following the war, the Imperial War Grave Commission (now known as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission or CWGC) oversaw a global network of 15,888 WWI memorials—many of whose locations correspond with neither where death occurred nor where bodies lay buried. The geographic scale of mourning, rather than the cumulative death toll, in World War I marked a turning point in the history of the dead in the modern era.

---

<sup>72</sup> For a brilliant examination on the toll Taiping Rebellion took on China, see Tobie Meyer-Fong, *What Remains: Coming to Terms with Civil War in 19th Century China, What Remains* (Stanford University Press, 2013).

<sup>73</sup> Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead*, 449.



Map 1.2: CWGC memorials to British Commonwealth WWI casualties. The memorial sites represent battlefields, corpse disposal sites, places of origin of soldiers who died abroad, and centralized memorials to the “missing”. Source: Author.

Hundreds of officials across dozens of administrative bodies made unprecedented efforts to recover, reclaim, and remember the sacrifice of the empire’s war dead after the war. No comparable effort had been previously contemplated, let alone attempted. The initiative required deceptively simple information: who died, when, and where. Since human capital was among the most important military resources during conflicts prior to World War I, it follows that the British Empire’s vast martial bureaucracy would meticulously track the condition and wartime fates of its service members. However, the scale of the conflict revealed alarming weaknesses in the extant system. Not only had “no scheme... been drawn up for the collection of the complete medical statistics” during wartime by 1914, but the peace-time system, with its complicated monthly and annual returns, proved “too elaborate” to implement

in a large scale conflict.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, it took over a decade of work to publish the most complete tabulation possible of imperial casualties during the war.

Before we can examine the IWCG's projects in Mesopotamia and the postwar fates of the bodies of Raje Ram and his companions, we must reconstruct what befell them during the war. In other words, we must hypothesize where their bodies were. What was happening to the Indian dead in Mesopotamia during the war itself? In answering this question, we pursue two critical goals for this chapter. First, in doing so we can better understand circumstances which informed IWGC operations in regard to Indian casualties. More importantly, I hope that beneath the incomparable number of casualties we can get a glimpse of the ultimate fates of the very lives the IWGC was charged to honor.

### **The 48<sup>th</sup> Pioneers**

Raje Ram had already enlisted in the Indian Army when the war started—likely even already promoted as a non-commissioned officer. Although many units were shuffled and received new recruits over the course of the war, the 48th Pioneers largely did not. The unit's history does not specify why this was the case. Perhaps it had to do with their specialized training as both combat engineers and infantry. Pioneer units laid railway tracks, constructed bridges, and made roads, providing the

---

<sup>74</sup> Major T. J. Mitchell and Miss G.M. Smith, *Medical Services: Casualties and Medical Statistics of the Great War* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1931), ix. Note: Standard bibliographic practices commonly omit the honorifics Miss, Mrs., and Mr. as forms of address for authors. However, I choose to include it here in the case of Miss G.M. Smith, who coauthored this work under her initials. I believe that in this case, uniform citation practices would erase this woman's labor since many readers would likely code the co-creator of a military centered publication published in 1931 under the name G.M. Smith as masculine. As we will see later in this chapter, equality and uniformity do not necessarily translate to equity.

built infrastructure the rest of the forces relied upon. Certainly, untrained young men found themselves on battlefronts throughout the conflict zones, but Pioneer units were distinguished by their unique training. Since “India alone expects campaigns by way of goat-tracks and mountain watercourses,” only the Indian Army already had established and trained Pioneer units ready for deployment before the outbreak of World War I.<sup>75</sup> The specialized training meant that fewer enlisted men qualified to supplement a struggling Pioneer unit.

Like the vast majority of men in the 48th Pioneers, Raje Ram came from Punjab Province (of which Delhi had been a part until 1912). Of those who perished, the available records provide the hometowns for over 90% of the 48th Pioneers. In addition to Raje Ram, at least nine more men came from within Delhi Province; another 434 members of the regiment hailed from elsewhere in Punjab Province. The Indian army categorized roughly half of the men in the 48th Pioneers as Labana Sikhs and the other half as Jats.

This particular demographic pairing reflected colonial frameworks on race and caste, such as the views presented in an 1899 handbook on Sikhs by Bengal infantry Captain A.H. Bingley. In his brief entry on Labanas (roughly one third of whom were Sikhs), he described them as “physically and intellectually, there is but little to choose between Labanas and Jats.”<sup>76</sup> Within the logic of martial race theories, the Labana Sikh subsection of the population was particularly well suited to military service due

---

<sup>75</sup> George Fletcher MacMunn and A. C Lovett, *The Armies of India* (London: A. and C. Black, 1911), 186.

<sup>76</sup> A. H. Bingley, *Sikhs* (Simla: Government Central Print. Office, 1899), 41.

to their “great courage and endurance.” And colonial ethnographers concluded that the caste’s “carrying trade” predisposed them to be “very knowledgeable in matters relating to transport” and thus well qualified for enlistment with Pioneer units.<sup>77</sup> The Indian army also actively recruited in Punjab, Rajputana, and the United Provinces from the agriculturalist Jat caste, from which many younger sons pursued military careers.<sup>78</sup> At the start of the twentieth century, the majority of the Jats in Delhi were Hindu; 2% of Delhi Jats were Muslim, and 0.7% were Sikhs.<sup>79</sup> Based on this information, the listed names of those who died in the unit, and the porous nature of religious identity in colonial South Asia, the majority of the 48th Pioneers likely identified as either Hindus or Sikhs (and sometimes Sikhs are counted among Hindus), with a handful of Muslim Jats.<sup>80</sup>

Hailing from Delhi, Raje Ram was likely a Hindu Jat. As is the case with many other castes, Hindu Jats did not always burn their dead (for instance instead burying the bodies of young children). However, had Raje Ram died at home, his family would have covered him in a white shroud, carried him to the cremation grounds on the same day that he died. After the flames claimed his body, his next of kin would have collected any unburnt bone fragments to the Jumna. If the family could afford it, they

---

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> For a detailed compilation of martial race theory as it interfaced with military recruitment strategies and the demographics of Indian enlistment in the decades leading to World War I, see David E Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940* (Macmillan, 1994), 10–38.

<sup>79</sup> *Delhi District, Statistical Tables: 1904*, vol. V Part B, Punjab District Gazetteers (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1904), xv–xvii.

<sup>80</sup> On the diversity of Sikh identity, see Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1994).

might build a chhatri over the precise of the cremation.<sup>81</sup> It is possible, even likely, that Raje Ram's family could have been afforded such a commemorative chhatri.

At the turn of the century Delhi Jats owned 48% of the cultivated land in the district.<sup>82</sup> Perhaps he was one of those second sons who pursued a military career. Alternatively, Jats were among the largest demographics in the district, so it is equally likely that Raje Ram's family had few resources to expend on funerals. According to an Indian army handbook, if a Jat man died far from kith and kin, then the family cremated an effigy made of grass. Whatever Raje Ram's socio-economic background, his family would never lay his actual body to rest themselves. A grass stand-in was as close as they could come to his corpse.<sup>83</sup>

### ***Entering the War***

The 48th Pioneers had been stationed at Kirkee, approximately 90 miles southeast of Bombay, when they received orders to mobilize within a week of Britain entering the war.<sup>84</sup> Instead of sailing for France, as originally intended, the unit sailed from the port at Bombay to join the invasion of southern Iraq in November 1914. When the 48th Pioneers landed along the river Shat el-Arab at Sanniya at full strength, nearly all 900 of its members were Indians save thirteen British officers.<sup>85</sup> By the end of the war, more than half of the unit would be dead.

---

<sup>81</sup> A. H. Bingley, *History, Caste & Culture of Jāts and Gūjars* (Simla: Government Central Print. Office, 1899), 63.

<sup>82</sup> *Delhi District With Maps: 1912*, vol. V Part A, Punjab District Gazetteers (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1913), 62–63.

<sup>83</sup> Bingley, *History, Caste & Culture of Jāts and Gūjars*, 63.

<sup>84</sup> August 13, 1914, War Diary for Divisional Troops: 48 Pioneers, WO 95/5118/2, Kew.

<sup>85</sup> The unit history lists the 13 British officers and one Indian officer by name and rank. Together, they led 18 Indian officers, 815 rank and file soldiers, and 92 followers.

At least thirteen Indians of the 48th Pioneers died within 72 hours of reaching Iraq. One more died a week later. This wasn't supposed to happen. The Pioneers had been detailed as general reserve, not front line combat, since their value lay in their technical and engineering training. Nonetheless, when fighting ensued on their way to Sahil,<sup>86</sup> an unnamed senior officer urged them to "push on" in a poorly planned fray, amidst a torrential downpour and poor military intelligence. Altogether, ninety of the 48<sup>th</sup> Pioneers were injured or killed in this initial fight for which "no definite objective was given with the first order to attack." Perhaps because he had not yet been deployed at that point, in the description of the event written, Captain W.B.P. Tugwell of the 121<sup>st</sup> Pioneers seemed almost amused (unlike the unit's annoyed war diary author at the time) by the 48<sup>th</sup> Pioneers' "baptism by fire" in his history of the units that would later be known as the Bombay Pioneers. Tugwell went on to explain that on the next day the 48<sup>th</sup> Pioneer's commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Hayward was "'on the mat'" before his superiors for "having so many casualties whilst his Battalion was only in reserve!"<sup>87</sup> Tugwell failed to mention, however, that the regiment lost more men and more officers that day than any of the other India regiments involved. The Indian Army lost a total of thirty-three men in the fighting at Sahil on November 17, 1914. In addition to the thirteen men of the 48th Pioneers, the Indian casualties that day included one captain, one lance naik, one sapper, and seventeen sepoy from six different units.

---

<sup>86</sup> The British incorrectly believed that "Sahil" was the proper name of a specific location, rather than the Arabic word for coast or seashore. I use the capitalized here to be consistent with period records and historical scholarship, much of which reproduces this error without correction.

<sup>87</sup> Tugwell, *History Of The Bombay Pioneers*, 213–15.

It's difficult to ascertain the precise cause of death and postmortem fates for those first casualties of the 48th Pioneers, as with many Indian casualties during the war—even when we know their name, regiment and service number, date of death, and location. During the rainstorm at Sahil, the winds washed away multiple dhows carrying sixty men from four different regiments on the Shatt el-Arab; ten of them drowned, but multiple sources confirm that those aboard from the 48th Pioneers managed to swim ashore.<sup>88</sup> Sepoy Harnam Singh from Dasuya Village in Punjab's Hoshiarpur District survived that first fight at Sanniya, but never recovered from the gunshot wound to his shoulder.<sup>89</sup> Neither the regimental war diary nor that of the casualty clearing section mention by name the thirteen members of the 48th Pioneers who died on November 17, 1914. We know that none of them were commissioned officers and all of them were Indians. Six sepoy, two buglers, one naik, two lance naiks, and two havildars. Twelve hailed from Punjab Provinces. The thirteenth, Sepoy Mehal Singh was from a Delhi province village a day's walk from Raje Ram's village). Few of the dead were disposed of according to their religious identifications; they could have been cremated, but again, we cannot know for sure.

We know there was time to dispose of the dead one way or another, even if the unit's war diary mentions neither cremation nor burial. After the fighting concluded, the 48th Pioneers made camp not far from Basra and remained in the area for four

---

<sup>88</sup> November 17, 1914, War Diary for Divisional Troops: 48 Pioneers, WO 95/5118/2, Kew.; November 17, 1914, War Diary for No.19 Combined Casualty Clearing Section (Mesopotamia), WO/95/5250/1, Kew; Tugwell, *History Of The Bombay Pioneers*, 215.

<sup>89</sup> November 25, 1914, War Diary for No.19 Combined Casualty Clearing Section (Mesopotamia), WO/95/5250/1.

days.<sup>90</sup> With the one notable exception of the British captain, all of the casualties from that day are considered among the war's more than 30,000 missing Indians commemorated at the Basra War Memorial. Documentation of the fates of the Indian dead was so thin in the postwar period that some British officials could not say for certain whether there had ever been documentation or if anything was done with the Indian war dead at all in certain theatres of war—particularly in the case of Mesopotamia and Egypt.

### *Questions of Disposal*

British military officials should have quickly become aware that there might be issues with religiously appropriate disposal of the Indian war dead. Early in the war, crosses were the only grave markers provided to imperial troops. Therefore, Indian troops in France made do with what was available to mark the burial places for their own dead. Ware directed that imperial forces in the area should provide plain boards on vertical supports for Indian troops. He further ordered that any such crosses already erected be replaced. Having learned of the issue, Ware explained, “I report the matter as it seems to me to raise an important question of principle.”<sup>91</sup> Whatever his reasons or understanding of colonial Indian troops, Ware was firm that they not be forced to adopt Christian iconography when burying their dead. By the time inquiries reached him from the Indian Soldier's Fund Committee in mid-1915, Ware assured them that “the special case of Indians” had “received careful consideration.”<sup>92</sup> Initially only

---

<sup>90</sup> November 17-22, 1914, War Diary 48 Pioneers, WO 95/5118/2, Kew

<sup>91</sup> F. Ware to Adjutant General, April 14, 1915, 1/1/1/26, CWGC.

<sup>92</sup> Ware to Arthur Lawley, September 10, 1915, 1/1/1/26, CWGC; The Indian Soldier's Committee was a British run charitable organization, which managed this fund during the war to supply religious and personal items to Indian soldiers overseas. See David E. Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War:*

responsible for conflict zones in France, then Belgium, Ware's burgeoning commission came to oversee all theatres of war.

French law only permitted funeral cremation within the confines of designated and wholly contained industrial crematoriums—which were few and far between. The astounding amount of unburied, unidentified bodies on the Western Front motivated Ware to engage with French parliamentarians in early 1915.<sup>93</sup> He hoped that in addition to paving the way for cremating the new war dead, the bill would also include provisions for exhuming and burning the already dead.<sup>94</sup> Without such legislative changes, any funeral cremations, Hindu, Sikh, or otherwise, in wartime France were technically illegal. The proposed Sénat bill addressing *l'incineration en temps de guerre* never came to fruition in the face of wide public opposition.<sup>95</sup> The French prohibition against open air cremations would continue to constrain postwar efforts, requiring that any exhumed Indians who perhaps should have been cremated instead be reburied.

Questions from British parliamentarians demonstrate that London politicians (outside of India Office officials) possessed at least a basic awareness of Indian corpse disposal as potentially distinct. A year after the failed French bill, Joseph King, MP for Somerset Northern, briefly pressed the issue of Indian corpse disposal methods on the Western Front. First, he asked whether Hindu soldiers were being cremated “in

---

*Soldiers' Letters, 1914-18* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 13–14.

<sup>93</sup> David Crane, *Empires of the Dead: How One Man's Vision Led to the Creation of WWI's War Graves* (London: William Collins, 2013), 66–67.

<sup>94</sup> Ware to Adjutant General, March 31, 1915, 1/1/1/26, CWGC.

<sup>95</sup> *Projet de Loi, n° 331 du 25 septembre 1915, Sénat* (France).

accordance with the religion and usage of their race.” He further inquired after Muslim burials, and whether they too were being “buried in such manner as to satisfy the demands of their religion.” Then Secretary of State for India, Austen Chamberlain, explained that “under the conditions of warfare it is not generally possible to arrange for cremation,” but noted to the member that neither was doing so religiously required. He tried to allay King’s concerns, assuring King that all such Hindu burials were being carried out by “fellow castemen with appropriate rites.” Notably, Chamberlain’s answer to the member further noted that “careful records of all such burials of Hindus and Mahomedans have been kept” to enable the postwar placement of permanent headstones.<sup>96</sup> King did not press the matter further, nor did he inquire as to the procedures for Hindus and Muslims in any of the other theatres of war.

## Documenting Death

### *Western Front*

Casualty documentation was most thorough in France and Belgium, where Fabian Ware began his work.<sup>97</sup> Nonetheless, records about casualties and the missing

---

<sup>96</sup> Hindu Soldiers (Cremation), May 9, 1916, HC Deb 09 May 1916 vol 82 cc448-9. Later in the year, another parliamentarian inquired after cremation on scientific and sanitary grounds, but again without luck. See Cremation (Western Front), November 14, 1916, HC Deb 14 November 1916 vol 87 cc567-8.

<sup>97</sup> In 1914 Ware’s mobile ambulance unit in collaboration with the British Red Cross Society began the work that eventually became the raison d’être for the Imperial War Graves Commission. I will not replicate here the origin story of the Imperial War Graves Commission, about which much has already been written, nor will I detail each administrative change in the organization’s early years. For readers who wish to delve more deeply into the history and significance of the Grave Registration Commission (GRC) in 1915, which in turn became the Directorate of Grave Registration and Enquiries (DGRE) in 1916, which finally became the IWGC in 1917 (known as CWGC since 1960), see Crane, *Empires of the Dead*. See also J. M Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge University Press, 1995); Edwin Gibson and G. Kingsley Ward, *Courage Remembered: The Story Behind the Construction and Maintenance of the Commonwealth’s Military Cemeteries and Memorials of the Wars of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945* (H.M. Stationery Office, 1995); Philip Longworth, *The Unending Vigil: A History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (Constable, 1967).

were often incomplete or awash with errors.<sup>98</sup> In some cases, graves could not be found because the individual was still alive.<sup>99</sup> The soldiers themselves placed their trust in the official information pipelines and appealed to their friends and families to do the same. Juma Khan, a Punjabi Muslim infantryman serving with the 40th Pathans in France, wrote home to quash rumors that he had died. He assured the friend who had arranged for funeral ceremonies in their village, that he was in truth alive and well. Juma Khan counseled them that "...when any calamity overtakes any of us, the CO himself sends information of the fact."<sup>100</sup> Next time, he said, "be more careful, and should you hear from a reliable source that I am dead, even then perform as small a funeral as is reasonable possible."<sup>101</sup> Despite this patchy nature of casualty records in France, after the war the IWGC would come to consider France and Belgium casualty documentation as exemplary.

Even official notice of death was difficult for families to trust. From a hospital for Indian troops, Havildar Muhammad Said took upon himself the difficult task of ensuring that one family in Hazara District understood the awful truth: their son was truly dead. In mid-July 1915 he wrote:

I have heard that not only in the villages and all over the country, soothsayers are practising their art, and giving out that so-and-so is lying wounded in such-and-such jungle and is eating leaves, and that so-and-so is dead. A sepoy named Najaf Khan died here and his death was notified to his people by the Sirkar. Now a letter from his father has been received here saying that a soothsayer had told him his son was living and lying wounded in a jungle...

---

<sup>98</sup> Ware, Report of the Work of the GRC, October 27, 1915, 1/1/1/26, CWGC.

<sup>99</sup> Ware to Robert Cecil, May 19, 1915, 1/1/1/26, CWGC.

<sup>100</sup> Juma Khan to Dulu Khan Gahi, November 1, 1915, as translated in Omissi's *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 116-117.

<sup>101</sup> As the present day database does not list a Juma Khan (or any similar names) among his unit's casualties, it seems hopeful no further in absentia funerals were necessary.

*My object in writing this is to tell you that the official information is correct, and true information is given by the Sirkar. That poor man's son is dead. The soothsayers cheat him and get money out of him. They deceive people by practising their arts and pretending to tell things that have happened thousands of miles away. [emphasis added]*<sup>102</sup>

The havildar took it upon himself, perhaps from a hospital bed himself, to bring an end to a family's last hope. Otherwise, he clearly felt their false hope left them vulnerable to exploitation.<sup>103</sup>

Ware's wartime correspondence makes one thing abundantly clear: he and his team (initially a mobile ambulance unit partnered with the British Red Cross Society) were building the plane while flying. One can follow along in real time as penciled inscriptions on wooden crosses gave way to hand painted ones, which in turn gave way to stencils and then stamped metal tapes over the course of less than a year.<sup>104</sup> And throughout his staff expended significant energy tracing possible burial locations across the French and Belgian countryside and amending records.<sup>105</sup> During this messy and ad hoc process, Ware appears to have recognized early on that the war dead were heterogeneous. At every stage, Ware and his superiors repeatedly had to clarify

---

<sup>102</sup> Havildar Muhammad Said to Nur Alam Khan, July 14, 1915, quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 78-79.

<sup>103</sup> According to present day records, no sepoy by the name Najaf Khan died in the war prior to December 1916. Although it is possible Havildar Muhammad Said's information was incorrect, it is equally likely (perhaps even more so) that the error lies in either the censor translating his letter in 1915 or in the transcription of the deceased sepoy's name in the casualty rolls. I believe this letter refers to Sepoy Najib Khan of the 82 Punjabis, son of Abbas Khan, from Bagra, Haripur in Hazara District in the NWFP, who died on April 14, 1915. In addition to his being a Hazari sepoy who died death matches the timeline, the difference in final consonants could easily be accounted for by a messily written final ف or ب at the end of the name.

<sup>104</sup> Fabian Ware, Draft letter to Arthur Stanley, 1915, 1/1/26, CWGC.

<sup>105</sup> Ware to George Henry Fowke, October 27, 1915, 1/1/26, CWGC.

that, yes, they were also responsible for Indian graves.<sup>106</sup> More than once, all British military burial instructions were modified to include provisions for the Indian dead.<sup>107</sup>

### *Punjabis & Dorset Men*

While white Europeans often omitted the Indian dead from the administrative records, visual evidence points to Indian soldiers patiently caring for their dead well away from the Western Front. A series of three nitrate photographs (Figure 1.5) entitled “Indians cremating their dead. Kantara, 1918.”<sup>108</sup> from the Imperial War Museum in London opens with four uniformed Indian men wearing turbans standing on a flat almost featureless sandy landscape in northeast Egypt, not far from the Suez Canal. The men look towards a dark, indistinct jumble of material the viewer understands to be at least one dead body—though possibly more—beginning to burn, the body (bodies?) shielded from view by cloth. In an environment similar to Mesopotamia with little available firewood, perhaps the men first soaked the cloth with a flammable solution. The second photo features only the burning heap, now thoroughly on fire. Strong winds blow the black billowing smoke nearly parallel to the ground. In the last photo, the fire has gone out. The viewer is up close and peering down at what remains of the man’s mostly burned carcass; the photographer’s elbow protrudes into the frame from the left. Surrounded by ashes and char, a prone human body clearly remains, blackened though it is. Centered in front of the photo is a short wooden post with a stenciled sign marking the cremation spot. The sign provides the dead man’s religion (Hindu), regimental service number (3842), and date of death

---

<sup>106</sup> Arthur Lawley to P.D. Agnew, August 19, 1915, 1/1/1/26, CWGC.

<sup>107</sup> Ware to M Medlicott, January 20, 1917, and Medlicott to Ware, March 27, 1917, 1/1/34/11, CWGC.

<sup>108</sup> Q 50831, Q 50832, and Q 50833, 1918, Imperial War Museum [hereafter IWM].

(July 1918; the actual day is difficult to make out in the photograph). It also supplies his name, rank, and unit.



Figure 1.5: Photographs documenting the cremation of Sepoy Partab Singh. *Top Left*: Kantara, 1918, Q50831; *Bottom Left*: Cremation of Indian troops. Kantara, 1918, Q50832; *Right*: Cremation of an Indian soldier. Kantara, 1918, Q50833, Imperial War Museum.

These images capture much more than merely “Indians cremating their dead,” both the dead and mourners devoid of any individual identity. Rather, these are men of the 25th Punjabis honoring Sepoy Partab Singh. Although at least sixty Indians by the name of Partab Singh died in service during the war, the information on the placard in the third photo allows us to identify the photographed funeral as that of Sepoy Partab

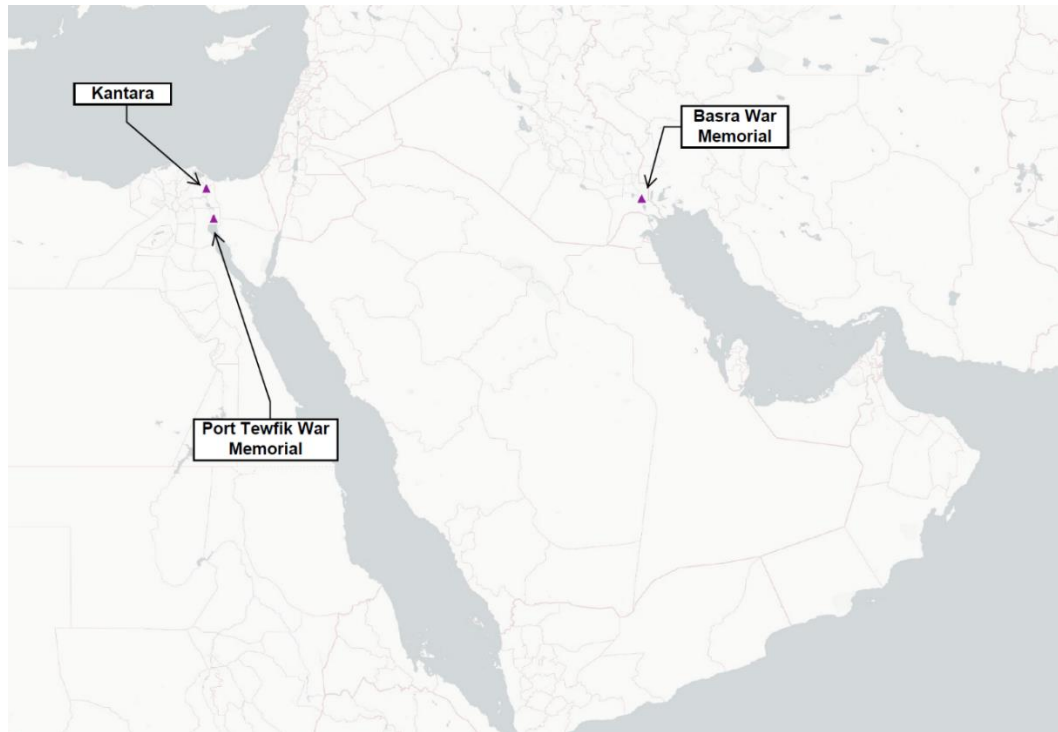
Singh, from Dasuya in Punjab's Hoshiarpur District.<sup>109</sup> Like Havildar Raje Ram of the 48th Pioneers, Partab Singh was also among the Basra War Memorial's "missing" according to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

This fact is surprising for a few reasons. First, while Partab Singh's cause of death remains unknowable thus far, his corpse was not missing. The war diary for the 25th Punjabis mentioned neither Partab Singh's death nor cremation. The entries indicate that the summer had been uneventful, with the men predominantly engaged in training and some road making in Kantara.<sup>110</sup> At the very least, this tells us that Partab Singh neither died amidst a chaotic battle, nor was his funeral a hurried affair. Multiple individuals were in attendance at his cremation, as evidenced by the rare photographic evidence captured by an unknown photographer. At one point, at least this handful of people knew the precise spot where Partab Singh was cremated. Precise location notwithstanding, both these photos and the unit's war diary firmly place the 25th Punjabis and Partab Singh's death in Egypt.

---

<sup>109</sup> CWGC, "Sepoy Partab Singh | War Casualty Details," Commonwealth War Graves Commission, accessed April 8, 2021, <https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/1680588/partab-singh/>.

<sup>110</sup> August entries, however, report daily new cases of "Bombay fever," as the 1918 flu was known in India. June-August 1918, War Diary for 25th Punjabis, WO 95/5227/6, Kew. On the 1918 pandemic in South Asia, see I.D. Mills, "The 1918-1919 Influenza Pandemic— The Indian Experience," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 23, no. 1 (March 1986): 1–40; Madhu Singh, "Bombay Fever/Spanish FLU: Public Health and Native Press in Colonial Bombay, 1918–19," *South Asia Research* 41, no. 1 (February 2021): 35–52; David Hardiman, "The Influenza Epidemic of 1918 and the Adivasis of Western India," *Social History of Medicine* 25, no. 3 (August 2012): 644–64.



Map 1.3: Necrogeography of Sepoy Partab Singh: where he died (Kantara), where he was commemorated (Basra), and where the so-called “missing” who died in Egypt were supposedly commemorated (Port Tewfik).

Why then, did a memorial to the war’s missing war dead in Mesopotamia come to include Partab Singh? Barely seventy miles south of Kantara, the commission intended for a different war memorial at Port Tewfik to honor the Indian Army’s missing war dead who died (or went missing and presumed to have died) in Egypt and Palestine. These images from Partab Singh’s funeral are instructive as we search for Raje Ram’s postmortem fate. They indicate first that “missing” was a relative term. Often defined in IWGC documentation as meaning those with “no known grave,” a corpse need simply be absent or merely unburied to be without a known grave.

This denotation points to a narrow and Eurocentric conception of appropriate corpse disposal, leaving no space for other traditions. Later in the war, one of the top military officials in Mesopotamia discouraged efforts to erect individual headstones

for Indians, since he was “of the opinion that the marking by name of individual graves is not considered to be of importance to the India”<sup>111</sup> Later, officials would support this claim by citing an absence of interest from Indian families. Derisively contrasting British and Indian next of kin, one official in Egypt wrote “not one enquiry has been received from relatives concerning the graves of Indian soldiers who have been killed or have died.”<sup>112</sup> However, even if we accept it to be true that these views were prevalent among those in positions of power, does it sufficiently explain the scale of how many Indians went “missing”?

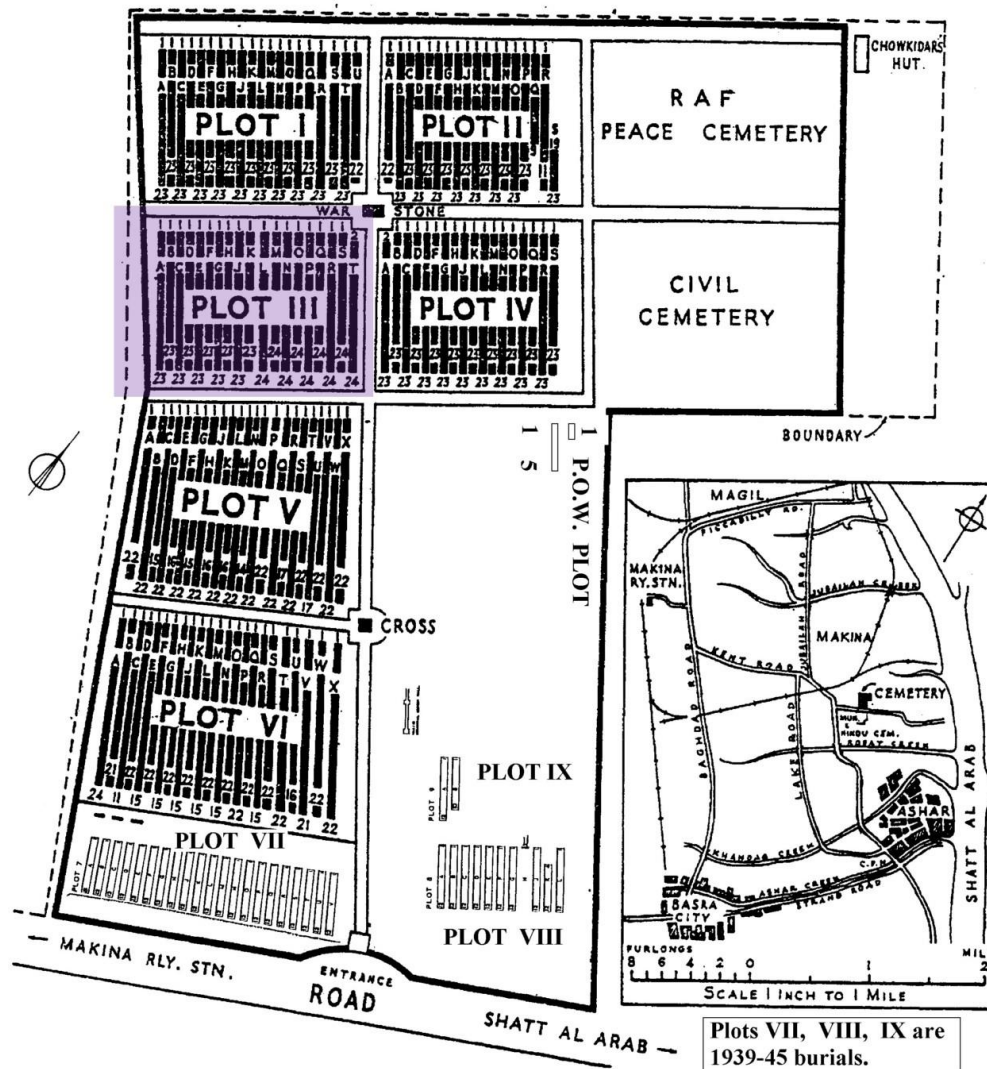
Let us revisit the first fight the 48th Pioneers encountered on November 17, 1914, because there was one unit that lost more men than they did that day. The British Army’s 2nd Dorsets (2nd Battalion Dorsetshire Regiment) were towards the head of the column moving north towards Basra, with the 48th Pioneers among those trailing. When the “leading troops came in touch with the enemy,” the 2nd Dorsets quickly were at the front of the attack.<sup>113</sup> By the end of the day, they had lost twenty-three men, including two commissioned officers. As was the case of the 48th Pioneers, the unit’s war diary did not mention burying these men. Nonetheless, their bodies were certainly buried. In contrast to Sepoy Partab Singh’s cremation at Kantara, someone affiliated with the 2nd Dorsets kept track of *where* the graves were.

---

<sup>111</sup> Copy of Memorandum N: A-1764/240, September 9, 1918, 1/1/7/E/28, CWGC.

<sup>112</sup> R.J. Hilson to General Headquarters, Egyptian Expeditionary Force, 1920, 1/1/7/E/28, CWGC.

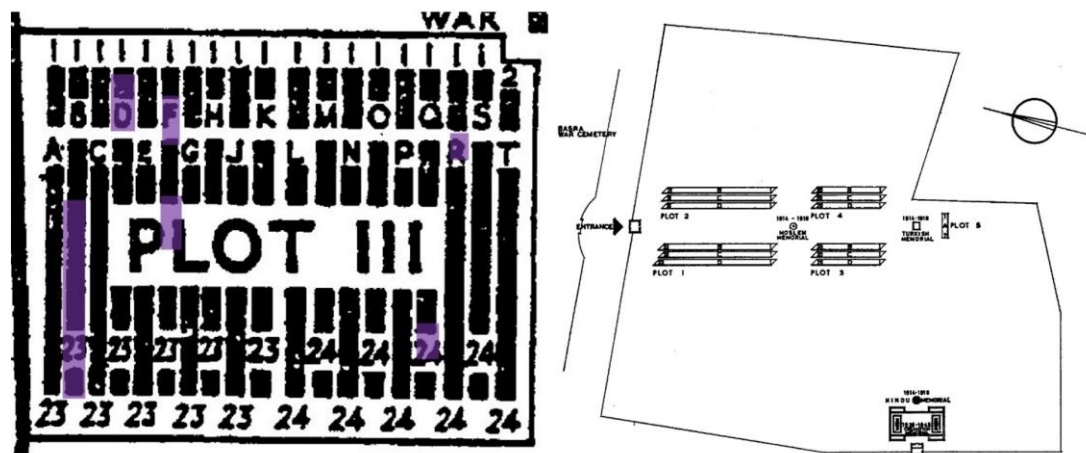
<sup>113</sup> November 17, 1914, War Diary 48 Pioneers, WO 95/5118/2, Kew.



Map 1.4: Basra War Cemetery Details with Plot III highlighted, CWGC Cemetery Plan 57200.

Over a century later, we can pinpoint precisely where their bodies lie: Plot III at the Basra War Memorial Cemetery. For each of the 2nd Dorsets who perished on November 17, 1914, there are corresponding row and grave locations. But they were not originally buried in Basra, which British forces had not yet occupied. Following the skirmish at Sahil, both the 2nd Dorsets and 48th Pioneers would have laid their dead to rest nearby. When the column proceeded to Basra a few days later, they were traveling light and would not have encumbered themselves by carrying their dead.

Only years later, once the war had finished, the IWGC coordinated the concentration of known scattered war graves, relocating many of them in central cemeteries more easily maintained. The members of the 2nd Dorsets were only a few among the many thousands exhumed and reburied. The precise grave spots were recorded, so that we know not only in which plot they lie, but where.



Map 1.5: Plot III of Basra War Cemetery and Indian Forces Cemetery. *Left:* Excerpt of CWGC Cemetery Plan 57200 with precise locations of the burial locations of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dorsets who died at Sahil. *Right:* Basra Indian Forces Cemetery Details with WWI Indian graves unmarked, CWGC Cemetery Plan 2038501.

### *The Indian Graves Committee*

Before the war had ended, IWGC officials began planning for the long term.

The commissions’ founding royal charter charged it with the perpetual maintenance of all of the organization’s future sites honoring the British Empire’s war dead.<sup>114</sup> Unlike its predecessors, the organization took on the creation of formal commemorations, as well as their perpetual maintenance. Consequently, they needed to give real and serious consideration to the post-war logistics of the empire’s dead. In particular, they planned to “concentrate” (exhume and rebury) many of haphazardly buried bodies into

---

<sup>114</sup> IWGC Royal Charter, May 1917, CWGC.

centralized cemeteries. The IWGC was particularly focused on the risk posed to graves in France and Belgium by the eventual resumption of agriculture. Many wartime graves were at places normally cultivated by local farmers, whose crops would be critical to the postwar recovery in those areas. Above all graves, those that remained *in situ* and those concentrated, the IWGC would erect permanent headstones. From the beginning, they laid heavy emphasis on uniformity of the grave markers such that there would be no distinction between how soldiers were honored regardless of rank.<sup>115</sup> They allowed, however, for some distinction on religious grounds—specifically they planned to create separate plots in the cemeteries for Christians and Indian. At this point it was not made clear where they intended to bury Indian Christians.

At the second meeting of the Imperial War Graves Commission, Lord Islington raised the question of Indian graves following the war.<sup>116</sup> He had settled into his role as Undersecretary of State for India, having previously served as the Governor of New Zealand. Now, in a room of sixteen white men (including the Prince of Wales, who chaired the meeting as the commission's president), Islington was the white man designated to represent Indian interests. In order to ensure that their plans appropriately honored all of India's religious communities, the IWGC did what every organization does: they created a subcommittee for the sole purpose of advising them.

The Indian Graves Committee met on March 20, 1918. The new committee had five members, three of whom were members of the commission itself. The High

---

<sup>115</sup> First Meeting of the IWGC, November 20, 1917, 2/2/1/1, CWGC.

<sup>116</sup> Second Meeting of the IWGC, February 18, 1918, 2/2/1/2, CWGC.

Commissioner for South Africa, W.P. Schreiner joined Lord Islington, who continued to represent Indian interests with the IWGC, as did Lt-Col G.H. Stobart as the committee's secretary. The Secretary of State for India Edwin Montagu had nominated Sir Prabhashankar Pattani and Sahibzada Aftab Ahmad Khan to represent the Hindu and Muslim faiths respectively. Members of the India Council in London, both men represented their communities' elite: Sir Prabhashankar Pattani was a well-connected Gujarati Brahman politician; Sahibzada Aftab Ahmad Khan was a Cambridge trained barrister, politician, and education proponent from Punjab.<sup>117</sup> Together they were expected to speak on behalf of all Indians and guide the commission in its handling of the Indian dead.

Ahmad Khan advised against exhuming Muslim soldiers. "So far as I am aware, according to [Islam], exhumation of Muhammadan dead bodies is not allowed," he told the committee.<sup>118</sup> He stipulated that, in places where there was even the remotest possibility of potential disturbance "any time in the future," they should relocate those graves pro-actively. In such cases, exhumation would be permissible if they were concentrated in a "central cemetery" in accordance with Muslim rites and under the supervision of a Muslim representative.<sup>119</sup> Muslims buried amongst Christians did not require relocation. Nonetheless, all Muslims graves should be marked with in a "permanent form with a pucca mound and suitable tablet," regardless

---

<sup>117</sup> The Ruling Princes, Chiefs and Leading Personages in the Western India States Agency (Rajkot: Western India States Agency Press, 1928), 209; Eminent Mussalmans (Madras: G. A. Natesan, 1926), 337–52.

<sup>118</sup> S. Aftab, "Graves of Muhammadan Soldiers in France," Indian Graves Committee, 1/1/5/29, CWGC.

<sup>119</sup> As an example, he suggested the Imam of Woking Mosque, in Woking, England. S. Aftab, Graves of Muhammadan Soldiers in France, Indian Graves Committee, 1/1/5/29, CWGC.

of whether they were concentrated in a central location or left *in situ*.<sup>120</sup> By “pucca” [pukka] mound, Khan described a grave with an intentional and crisp round mound of earth rather than the surface above the grave being flush with the ground around it—and thus visually distinguishing the burial site from the land around it.

Ahmad Khan also included a design sketch with Arabic inscription, which he offered to explain to whomever was tasked to prepare the stones. The inscription read:

هُوَ الْغَفُورُ  
Name of the deceased  
أَنَا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

It opened praising God (“he is ever forgiving”), calling him al-Ghafour, one of the most common names of God used in Quran. Beneath the individual’s name, Ahmad Khan proposed inscribing a widely evoked Quranic command (2:156), which promises the God’s blessings upon those who say *innā lillāh wa-innā ilayhi rāji‘ūn* (“we belong to God and to Him we shall return”) at times of great difficulty.<sup>121</sup> In addition to being a recognizable religious quote, this particular recitation had assumed vernacular usage outside of specifically religious contexts in the Muslim world, especially during times of hardship and upon getting news of a death.<sup>122</sup>

Sir Prabhashankar Pattani’s instructions for Hindu soldiers called for the exhumation subsequent cremation of all buried Hindus soldiers. In France and Belgium, as well as “other fronts,” he suggested use of a central location to carry out

---

<sup>120</sup> Minutes of a Meeting of the Indian Graves Committee, March 20, 1918, 1/1/5/29, CWGC.

<sup>121</sup> M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, trans., *The Qur’an: English Translation & Arabic Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>122</sup> Franklin Lewis, “Persian Literature and the Qur’ān,” ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe et al., *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, n.d., accessed March 3, 2021.

this “necessary religious rite.”<sup>123</sup> Pattani says that in normal circumstances the body is taken to “a crematorium which is generally situated on a river bank or... on the seashore.”<sup>124</sup> Barring that possibility, it would also be permissible to build funeral pyres on the fields where they fell in what Pattani termed “isolated cremations.” Afterwards, the soldiers’ remains should be “thrown into the sea.” Given that he expected the vast majority of buried Hindus to be burned, he interpreted the commission’s plans for separate cemeteries for Indians and Christians as separate cemeteries for “Christians and Mahommedans.” He did not imagine a need for Hindu cemeteries.

It was important to Pattani that incineration, as a method of disposal, did not translate to an absence of memorialization space. In the context of the larger corpse concentration scheme, he proposed “to have a crematory put up by the side of the two cemeteries similarly enclosed and laid out with lawns, trees and flower beds. In the centre of the grounds may be erected a Chhatri...”<sup>125</sup> His vision of a contemplative green space reflects an effort to hold physical space for the Hindu war dead, whose cremations technically rendered room for graves unnecessary. It accounted for the absence of gravestones engraved with individual names, noting that on the walls of the chhatri “the names of the fallen men should be inscribed. These inscriptions will serve

---

<sup>123</sup> Sir Prabhashankar Pattani, Hindus, February 17, 1918, Indian Graves Committee, 1/1/5/29, CWGC.

<sup>124</sup> Although Pattani uses the English words “crematorium” and “crematory” in this document, he refers to places where open-air cremations occur, rather than an industrial, enclosed facility as the terms are commonly used in Western Europe and the United States.

<sup>125</sup> Sir Prabhashankar Pattani, Hindus, February 17, 1918, Indian Graves Committee, 1/1/5/29, CWGC.

the purpose of the headstones of the dead of the other two communities.” The material presence, or lack thereof, of the Hindu bodies did not need to preclude honoring them.

Even though Pattani prescribed incinerating all Hindu corpses, he still emphasized cremation locations over the space where the individual had died or been originally buried. The importance attached to disposal locations is expressed in his suggestion for the cremations to occur beside the concentrated cemeteries for Christians and Muslims. That the cremations should occur in those locations, enables the erection of the chhatri in that precise location.

Disposal sites and commemorative sites had to be one and the same. When isolated cremation had “to be resorted to,” Pattani called for placing headstones at those locations. These individuals could not be honored on the chhatri walls where concentrated cremations took place, since their bodies had been incinerated elsewhere. If and only if exhumation and cremation were impossible, Pattani allowed for leaving the body buried and placing a headstone. Gravestones for both bodies left *in situ* and isolated cremations were to read “Here fell, (not ‘Here lies’).”<sup>126</sup> Although Pattani did not elaborate as to why those Hindu soldiers left buried should receive the same inscription as those cremated remotely, it points to a logic rooted in differentiating between Hindus and non-Hindus, rather than deploying accurate language to describe the corpse’s fate.

Both Pattani and Ahmad Khan provided a single set of directives, treating all Hindus in one fashion and all Muslims in another fashion. They neither noted

---

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

exceptions based on caste or sect, nor mentioned Sikh soldiers. In that way, their recommendations complied with the flattened categories Islington had referenced: Christians and Indians, with Indians bifurcated as Hindus and Muslims only. Pattani even ended his recommendations with the assurance that the procedures he laid out for Hindus should not incur greater costs than the expenses for cemeteries for the either of “the other two communities,” Muslims and Christians.<sup>127</sup>

Following the one and only meeting of the Indian Graves Committee for which meeting minutes exist (and perhaps the only formal meeting that took place), Stobart prepared the following three recommendations for Indian corpse disposal:

1. THAT, EXCEPT in cases where there was the slightest apprehension of the grave being moved, Mohammedan graves should be left undisturbed.
2. THAT ANY BODIES of Hindus which had received burial should, where possible, be exhumed and cremated in some central place where it was possible to consign the ashes to the elements. If cremation were not possible bodies should be allowed to remain in their present position and marked with headstones bearing the device “Here fell Etc”
3. THAT IN CASES where exhumation was necessary, the bodies of Mohammedans should be concentrated in a central reserved cemetery. If exhumation were not possible the graves should be marked by a headstone.<sup>128</sup>

These recommendations are notable for how they distill the lengthier statements Pattani and Ahmad Khan submitted in advance and then presented to Islington, Stobart, and Schreiner. Aftab Ahmad Khan’s prepared statement and the earlier content of the minutes call for leaving Muslim bodies in place only “if it were certain that the graves could permanently remain” in their present state. However, exhumation

---

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Minutes of a Meeting of the Indian Graves Committee, March 20, 1918, 1/1/5/29, CWGC.

was necessary if there was “any cause” to believe “that the grave would be *disturbed* at a later date.” The formal recommendation, on the hand, substituted “moved” in place of “disturbed,” which could suggest that actions short of relocation did not call for exhumation. In the same vein, the recommendations omit entirely Pattani’s recommendation for isolated cremations entirely, even though they too were included in the minutes and there was no record of discussion at the meeting to amend Pattani’s advice. The Indian Graves Committee provided no suggestions for burying or cremating Indian bodies for whom religious affiliation was not clearly apparent.

It did not take long for officials to leverage the statements by Prabhashankar Pattani and Sahibzada Aftab Ahmad Khan in their explanations of why they took minimal action to preserve Indian grave sites. The circulation of both meeting minutes and the prepared statements contributed to this distortion. In one case, the IGC’s work was reinterpreted such that the risk of disturbance became a requirement for exhuming any Indian bodies, not just Muslims.<sup>129</sup> In another instance, Ahmad Khan’s prepared statement was read aloud at a 1918 meeting on grave concentration in Egypt. The minutes mischaracterized his recommendations. Instead of calling for concentration in the face of slight apprehension of disturbance, the minutes claimed that exhumation was only necessary in places where there was “grave risk of the burial sites being destroyed.”<sup>130</sup> Later in 1920, Major R.J. Hilson cited these meeting minutes while arguing that the IWGC itself had given orders not to do anything with Indian graves

---

<sup>129</sup> A.1/16555, April 2, 1919, 1/1/7/E/28, CWGC.

<sup>130</sup> Minutes of the Third Meeting of the Egyptian War Cemeteries Executive Committee, December 30, 1918, 1/1/7/E/3, CWGC.

until directed otherwise.<sup>131</sup> Notably, he omitted any reference to Ahmad Khan or the Indian Graves Committee at this time.

### *Mesopotamia*

At some point during the war, it appears wires had been crossed regarding how to register the dead in Mesopotamian of the theatres of war. According to the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief for the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force, they had relied on the advice of one individual: Sir Umar Hayat Khan. A decorated soldier and an officer in the All-India Muslim League, Umar Hayat Khan was also one of the most powerful landholders in the entire Punjab.<sup>132</sup> During the war he served first in France, then in Mesopotamia, during which time he rose to be a Knight Commander of the Indian Empire.<sup>133</sup> Given his prestige, commanders in Mesopotamia claimed to have spoken with Umar Hayat Khan during his time in Mesopotamia about “the question of graves registrations.” Without providing details, “in accordance with his advice, orders were given that the Graves Registration Unit should confine its attention to British Graves only.”<sup>134</sup>

It feels almost a pleasant surprise that British officials sought out an Indian opinion before establishing policies that impacted Indians. And in addition to earning the esteem of the British through his military service, Umar Hayat Khan actively represented Indian interests throughout his career, later serving on the Council of State

---

<sup>131</sup> R.J. Hilson to General Headquarters, Egyptian Expeditionary Force, 1920, 1/1/7/E/28, CWGC.

<sup>132</sup> On Malik Khan Umar Hayat and his family during the war, see Tahir Mahmood, “Collaboration and British Military Recruitment: Fresh Perspectives from Colonial Punjab, 1914–1918,” *Modern Asian Studies* 50, no. 5 (September 2016): 1474–1500.

<sup>133</sup> June 3, 1916, No 29608 Supplement to the London Gazette.

<sup>134</sup> Copy of Memorandum N: A-1764/240, September 9, 1918, 1/1/7/E/28, CWGC.

and Punjab's provincial legislative assembly. At the same time, colonial officials had a long track record of soliciting advice from a small group of Indian elites, from whose opinions they would draft policies predominantly affecting the non-elite. It might not have occurred to Umar Hayat Khan that the army would need to expend special resources to track graves. Khan's elite background meant that he was unlikely to ever contemplate record of his own burial spot being lost.<sup>135</sup> Thousands of Indians from surrounding villages later attended his 1944 burial in the family cemetery, where his marble grave stands to this day.<sup>136</sup>

Indian Army Major R.J. Hilson was explicit regarding the fate of the Indian war dead: the only bodies cremated in Mesopotamia were those of Hindus who died at British controlled Basra "where firewood [was] available for cremation purposes."<sup>137</sup> At the base at Basra, cremations were "carried out to a modified extent," though the letter writer fails to specify further regarding the modifications.<sup>138</sup> Letters by Indian soldiers in the region supported the assertion that firewood was not readily available, often describing the landscape as desolate except for date trees.<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, as a matter of some fairness to Hilson and his peers, the war had challenged the

---

<sup>135</sup> Thousands of Indians from surrounding villages later attended his 1944 burial in the family cemetery, where his marble grave stands to this day. See Tariq Amir, "Kalra: The Estate of Malik Khizar Hayat Tiwana The Last Premier of Punjab," *Pakistan Geotagging*, January 7, 2020, archived on December 7, 2020 at:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20201207040548/http://pakgeotagging.blogspot.com/2020/01/124-kalra-estate-of-malik-khizar-hayat.html>.

<sup>136</sup> Ian Talbot, *Khizr Tiwana: The Punjab Unionist Party and the Partition of India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 15–16, 155.

<sup>137</sup> R.J. Hilson to R.C. Wilson, July 7, 1919, 1/1/7/E/28, CWGC.

<sup>138</sup> Copy of Letter No A 1754/348, June 17, 1919, 1/1/7/E/28, CWGC.

<sup>139</sup> Abdul Rauf Khan to Lance Dafadar Abdul Jabar Khan, March 7, 1916, quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 160.

bureaucratic tracking of human capital (human lives) for every party involved regardless of location.<sup>140</sup> Famously, in France over 19,000 British soldiers died in a single day at single location: the first day of the Battle of the Somme. So called “body density maps” allowed the IWGC’s wartime predecessor to document battlefield burials.<sup>141</sup>

The veracity of Hilson’s claim of so few cremations and that they only occurred in Basra contradicted claims by other military officials. The prior memorandum noting Sir Malik Umar Hayat Khan’s recommendation also asserted the “fact that the bodies of Hindus and Sikhs who died in hospitals at the base, and elsewhere, have in many cases been cremated.”<sup>142</sup> Although, the basis for this “fact” remains unclear, since the memo also noted that there had been “no attempt...to register the names of those bodies have been burned in the various places set apart for cremation.” This final part is particularly puzzling given that no other records refer to physical spaces in Iraq as having been designated for funeral cremations. Where were these locations? Who delineated their purpose? And who was responsible for them? Two years later, the general commanding the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force echoed that “no register has been kept of the names of those whose bodies have been burned.”<sup>143</sup> Nonetheless, he was somehow able to report that approximately thirty

---

<sup>140</sup> Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead*, 460..

<sup>141</sup> *Body Density Map*, M. 5/761, IWM. These maps were essential to later efforts to exhume bodies and rebury them in concentrated cemeteries on the Western Front.

<sup>142</sup> Copy of Memorandum N: A-1764/240, September 9, 1918, 1/1/7/E/28, CWGC.

<sup>143</sup> Major General G.R. to War Section (Casualties), Army Headquarters, January 15, 1920, 1/1/7/E/28, CWGC.

Indians had been cremated at Ahwaz, Kut, and Baghdad. Additional numbers and further details, however, were not easy to come by.

Of those Indians buried, Major Hilson claimed that individual post commandants were “responsible for the registration of the graves of Indians in cemeteries in their respective areas.” But he admitted that such records were not sent to the Graves Registration Unit, “which therefore keeps no records of the graves of Indians”.<sup>144</sup> What did happen to those records, however, is less clear. Casualty appendices accompanied the war diaries for every Indian force in the war. As one of the Lead Curators for the India Office Records, Margaret Makepeace, has noted, “strangely” the lone exception was Expeditionary Force D in Mesopotamia.<sup>145</sup>

In the absence of well organized records, the issue of identifying graves often came down to an unwillingness to expend labor costs. The IWGC Inspector of Works in Iraq did not see the merit in his colleagues pursuing identifications for even a fraction of the Indian dead there. Discounting Basra hospital cemeteries entirely, he estimated there were only 5,000 Indian graves in Baghdad that had “any possibility” of being identified. And of those, they would need to comb through hospital registers that had been forwarded to India since the end of the war.<sup>146</sup>

### **Missing & “Missing”**

“Missing” did not necessarily mean missing. Officials estimated that in the Mesopotamia campaign only 3,465 British and 3,844 Indians were “missing (in the

---

<sup>144</sup> R.J. Hilson to R.C. Wilson, July 7, 1919, 1/1/7/E/28, CWGC.

<sup>145</sup> Margaret Makepeace, “Finding Indian Soldiers Who Served in World War One,” British Library: Untold Lives, September 9, 2014, <https://blogs.bl.uk/untoldlives/2014/09/finding-indian-soldiers-who-served-in-world-war-one.html>.

<sup>146</sup> Extract from Report of Inspector of Works, January 1, 1922, 1/1/7/E/28, CWGC.

military sense).”<sup>147</sup> This usage reflects that which remains in common usage today, referring to those reported as “missing in action.” Individuals missing “in the military sense” were alive at the time of their last sighting, and their fate technically unknown. Perhaps they never returned from a patrol, possibly having deserted, been taken prisoner of war, or killed. Perhaps they went into a battle, never to be seen again, dead or alive. If military forces successfully determined an individual’s fate after the war (for instance, revealing that they had died in a POW camp), then whether or not there was a known grave location that individual was no longer missing in the military sense. Nonetheless, they might remain “missing” in the IWGC sense of the word.<sup>148</sup> These overlapping and nebulous meanings for the designation of “missing” in the context of the war dead at times confused both those outside the IWGC organization and its own personnel.<sup>149</sup>

The category “missing” served as a catch-all for those without a known burial location. When the Director of Records reported the above estimates for the missing, he combined them with the estimates of those killed, resulting in a total of 19,066 British and 28,002 Indian war dead in Mesopotamia. From each total he subtracted the number of graves concentrated in cemeteries in Baghdad, Basra, Amara, and Kut: “5,965 identified British graves and 38 *identified Indian graves*.”<sup>150</sup> It is worth taking a moment to pause over that number—the British armed forces had identified only 38

---

<sup>147</sup> Ref. 11/G22/302/R, Director of Records to Director of Works, July 11, 1922, 1/1/9/C/26, CWGC.

<sup>148</sup> Armed with a list of names of Indians buried in certain Istanbul cemeteries, one IWGC official complained that he had been unable to find any trace of their graves owing to the vast size of the cemeteries they were buried within. Letter No.1791, December 13, 1920, 1/1/7/E/28, CWGC.

<sup>149</sup> H.F. Robinson to Chettle, October 4, 1922, 1/1/9/C/26, CWGC.

<sup>150</sup> Ref. 11/G22/302/R, Director of Records to Director of Works, July 11, 1922, 1/1/9/C/26, CWGC.

graves for the over 28,000 Indians believed to have died in Mesopotamia during a four year window. In other words, 99.9% of Indians were “missing” in IWGC terms, compared with 68% of British service members. Nonetheless, many of the Indian war dead were among the missing in every sense of the word.

Exactly one year after they had arrived in Mesopotamia, the fate of the 48th Pioneers took a distinct turn for the worse. Since the previous January, they had primarily engaged in physical infrastructure that enabled the work of combat troops. For example, in early July 1915 the 48th Pioneers “cut a channel from the Akaika to a marsh to the North, so that a gun-raft could move towards the enemy’s left flank. [They] also felled 40 trees which impeded the view.”<sup>151</sup> High ranking officials had been upset with the level of combat involvement and consequent casualties at Sahil the year prior, because this was the sort of work Pioneer units had been brought in to complete. The unit provided support periodically over much of 1915, but deaths were rare. Then came the disastrous Battle of Ctesiphon in late November. In less than three days, the 48th Pioneers lost over 82 men—more than triple the combined deaths of the rest of 1915 combined.<sup>152</sup> The majority of the deaths at Ctesiphon were sepoy (60 deaths) and non-commissioned Indian officers (14 deaths). Six commissioned officers also died in the fight: four Indians and two Brits.

Unlike Sahil, there was not time to dispose of the dead in an orderly fashion after the Battle Ctesiphon. At one point, the British forces involved at Ctesiphon had

---

<sup>151</sup> Tugwell, *History Of The Bombay Pioneers*, 226.

<sup>152</sup> According to CWGC records, the 48<sup>th</sup> Pioneers only lost a total of twenty-six men over the course of the other 362 days of the year in 1915.

to contend with the bodies of the dead before they could regroup for the night.

Tugwell reports that “there was some confusion amongst the maze of trenches blocked with corpses” before the units were able to find and gather their men.<sup>153</sup> Although he omits to which side the strewn bodies belonged, elsewhere British reports identified them as Turkish, not imperial.<sup>154</sup> That said, General Townsend, who led the 6th Poona Division of which the 48th Pioneers were but one small part, ultimately ordered a retreat to the village of Kut. Even if the 48th Pioneers were able to bury their dead after the battle, none were sufficiently documented or marked to be found after the war. Every service member the unit lost at Ctesiphon remains among the war’s missing to the present day—including the two high ranking British officers.

Instead of respite, Kut marked a new low point for the Mesopotamia Campaign. Turkish forces surrounded the village in December, and held the British led forces under siege until Townsend’s surrender in April 1916. Most secondary sources note that the siege trapped between 9,000 and 10,000 men under Townsend’s command. Striking as this number may be, it omits approximately 3,500 non-combatant Indians whose labor enabled the war effort. Estimates range, but it is likely that between 1,500 and 2,500 people died in Kut during the siege.<sup>155</sup>

---

<sup>153</sup> Tugwell, *History Of The Bombay Pioneers*, 234.

<sup>154</sup> *History of the Great War Based on Official Documents: The Campaign in Mesopotamia, 1914-1918*. Vol II, page 89, IOR/L/MIL/17/15/66/2, BL.

<sup>155</sup> Some of the details of the Siege of Kut are missing from the official records of the 48th Pioneers. Perhaps they were destroyed intentionally. In the final lead-up to Townsend’s surrender in late April, orders were given to destroy guns, ammunition, and other supplies that might be useful to the Turkish forces. The surviving war diaries for the 48th Pioneers end just before November 1915 and did not resume until over a year later.

Unable to receive fresh supplies, reduced rations led to starvation. One British lieutenant with another unit, Henry C. Gallup, derided Indians in his diary, blaming them for their own suffering. They had, he believed,

brought a great deal of it on themselves by refusing to eat horseflesh until the last few days one seldom went into the town without seeing several deaders being brought forth on stretchers for burial from one or other of the hospitals...<sup>156</sup>

While some vegetarian Hindus may have indeed largely refused to eat meat during the siege, the casualties among the 48th Pioneers do not bear this out. The first month of the siege was the deadliest for the unit.

Those early deaths in December and January are at least in part attributable to Turkish bombardment on the forces trapped in Kut. Starvation would not have set in yet. By February, however, Tugwell reports that “Indian troops [in Kut] were getting practically no rations except coarse barley flour.”<sup>157</sup> Notably, Miner, Sapper, and Pioneer units were the exception, receiving “a little rice” as well. This supplement was intended to compensate for the hard labor for which they were responsible, but even that was insufficient. Tugwell describes some of the difficulties in inducing Indians to eat horsemeat. In addition to contending with vegetarianism among some Hindus, many Muslims refused to consume horse as well.<sup>158</sup>

Many Indians remained skeptical. Whatever the diktats issued by the elite, “sepoys doubted if these opinions would be accepted in their village, and as *it was*

---

<sup>156</sup> Transcript of Lieutenant Henry Curtis Gallup's diary, 3 December 1915 to 10 March 1917, 1986-11-43-4, UK National Army Museum.

<sup>157</sup> Tugwell, *History Of The Bombay Pioneers*, 273.

<sup>158</sup> Depending on the interpretation, consuming horse is either *haram* (forbidden) or *makrooh* (detestable or disapproved of) in Islam.

*constantly being impressed on them that they were just about to be relieved, they thought it better to hang out a bit longer rather than run the risk of being ostracized*” [emphasis added]. The clause buried in the center of this sentence by Tugwell (and which he does not explore further), may lend some truth to Gallup’s remark above. However, it further indicates that the choice to refrain from eating what little food was available was a complicated one. British forces outside of Kut made multiple failed attempts to relieve the besieged British and Indians. Rather than an irrational refusal or one dictated by religious dogma, such refusal was rooted in messaging from their superiors.<sup>159</sup> It also reveals their familiarity with the disconnect between elite representations on matters of religion by the few and the lived experiences of their families and communities back in India.

According to Tugwell, the 48th Pioneers were less reticent than some of their peers. They were “one of the first units” at Kut to relent and try eating horse meat.<sup>160</sup> Expecting that the digestive systems of lifelong vegetarians among the Hindu Jats might experience distress suddenly consuming meat, he describes a process by which horsemeat was first introduced as a soup. At the same time, as the author of a regimental history and veteran of the Mesopotamia campaign himself, Tugwell was invested in a positive overall portrayal of all members of the Pioneer units included in his volume.

---

<sup>159</sup> General Townsend himself “confidently expected to be relieved some day during the first half of February.” See Tugwell, *History Of The Bombay Pioneers*, 272.

<sup>160</sup> Tugwell, 273–74.

Imperial forces lost track of dead bodies for a multitude of reasons. As in the Western Front, continued shelling of combat zones tore at the earth and disinterred even well buried bodies. In other instances, the bodies might remain in place, but shells also frequently displaced the grave markers upon which displayed identifying information.<sup>161</sup> Without records of grave locations on maps, the loss of a wooden cross or post might prevent later parties from locating the grave again for either exhumation or erecting a permanent postwar marker. Many wartime and postwar sources describe Ottoman forces and local Iraqi communities alike looting battlefields. One father, himself a colonel, recounted how “in the course of [his] service” in late 1917 he visited the Shumran area where, one of his own sons had died fighting in February that year: “I found what was left of many of the men who fell there, lying about on the ground...”<sup>162</sup>

The IWGC drew public scrutiny in a 1923 report in *The Times* describing the condition of the battlefield at Sannaiyat.

...nor had the Arabs, more thorough scavengers than jackals, been yet able to clear everything away. Here the party saw the miserable debris of battle, strands and tangles of barbed wire, rotted rags of sandbags and equipment bits of Mills grenades, pieces of shell, and a few unexploded H.E. shell rusted brown with age. Most pathetic of all were the bones. They abounded everywhere... Doubtless all had been buried at one time, as best might be; but to the action of the annual floods must be added the habits of the Arabs.<sup>163</sup>

The correspondent disparaged the local community in order to impress upon the reader precisely how much lay strewn across the battlefield. In this description, human bones

---

<sup>161</sup> Fabian Ware to Adjutant General, October 27, 1915, 1/1/1/26, CWGC.

<sup>162</sup> Colonel James Blumfield to IWGC, January 1923, Memorials to the Missing, 1/1/9/C/26, CWGC.

<sup>163</sup> Special Correspondent, “Battlefields Of Iraq,” *Times*, December 12, 1923.

are but one category of inanimate things among many. They are literally and metaphorically disconnected from any individual, corpse, or person. This partial state of anonymous remains renders them as material “debris,” rather than disinterred burials.

Over the years, reports from Mesopotamia revealed the mutable nature the region’s necroscape. Following the article in *The Times*, the IWGC Director of Works defended the condition of the Sannaiyat at the somewhat annual meeting the Iraq War Graves Committee. He assured those present that report of unburied bones on the battlefield was inaccurate. The Sannaiyat “had been thoroughly cleared of all bones.” The Army had collected any scattered, unidentifiable bones into “two large mounds,” which remained “in good condition” despite press claims to the contrary.<sup>164</sup> And yet, barely two years later, IWGC Chief Clerk George Peek appealed to his superiors for money for “cleaning up” multiple sites, including the Sannaiyat Battlefield. Peek reported that Turkish and Indian burials in the trench systems along both banks of the Tigris were “constantly cropping out.” He reburied them as much as possible. Nonetheless, it was a sufficiently frequent issue that Peek warned he “cannot continually cope with the work.”<sup>165</sup> Alas, he received no support. His colleagues merely advised that Indian and Turkish remains found at those battlefields “should be reburied in situ and as deeply as possible in order to diminish the risk of further disturbance.”<sup>166</sup> Despite the earlier dismissals, the IWGC officials seemed unable to

---

<sup>164</sup> Minutes of the Fourth Meeting of the Iraq War Graves Committee, January 11, 1924, 1/1/7/E/79, CWGC.

<sup>165</sup> George Peek to H.F. Robinson, December 11, 1925, 1/1/7/E/28, CWGC.

<sup>166</sup> Arthur Brown to Peek, January 15, 1926, 1/1/7/E/28, CWGC.

escape *The Times* correspondent's earlier observation: on the Western front "it was the monster artillery which left the final mark on all the battle-grounds; here in Mesopotamia it was the 'unknown soldier.'"<sup>167</sup>

In his comments at the IWGC's second meeting, Lord Islington had identified two potential hazards that they would need to grapple with: First and foremost, he emphasized India's religious diversity. It was paramount that "religious requirements of the different castes and creeds should be scrupulously respected" at every stage of the memorialization. To demonstrate the differing needs for India's religious communities, Islington cited exhumation as against Islam, while "whenever possible" Hindus cremated their dead. Consequently, "they [Hindus] would naturally desire" any memorial or monument "erected as near as possible to the spot where they were cremated."

Islington's second warning to the commission relied on the conflation of religious and racial identities in the empire at the time: "there should be nothing in the nature of disparity between the cemeteries of Indians and those of Christians."<sup>168</sup> The phrasing implied that Christians were not Indian and Indians were not Christian. It is also worth noting that Islington could not very well contrast "Indian" and "British," since the commission was, by definition, an empire-wide project. The elite board included dual American-Canadian citizen and High Commissioner for Canada and former New Zealand Prime Minister Thomas Mackenzie. On the one hand, Islington seemed to anticipate that the unequal treatment of the empire's dead would mirror

---

<sup>167</sup> Special Correspondent, "Battlefields Of Iraq," *Times*, December 12, 1923.

<sup>168</sup> Second Meeting of the IWGC, February 18, 1918, 2/2/1/2, CWGC.

some of the religious and racial boundaries within the empire's populations. On the other hand, his narrow focus reflects and limited assigned constituency. His concerns did not extend to other majority non-white colonial troops who had served in the war. The logic of difference, upon which so much of the empire relied, meant that in this context "Christians" excluded groups such as West Indians from Jamaica or East African Carrier Corps. Despite Islington's admonition, the question of equity between IWGC commemorations for Indians and "Christians" (read: white) rarely reappeared in organizational correspondence or meeting minutes. In contrast, the risk of offending the religious sensibilities retained pertinence for decades. Officials were far more preoccupied with ensuring memorials were unoffensive than they were with accuracy or equity. It was paramount that in all theatres of war, commemorative sites be "plain" and certain "not [to] offend caste prejudices or religious sentiments" for both Hindus and Muslims.<sup>169</sup>

According to military and IWGC officials, there was no way to know how to dispose the vast majority of Indians who died in Mesopotamia. Whether through administrative failures, neglect, or intentional marginalization, most Indian war dead had been severed from their individual identities after burial. In some of the "larger Indian cemeteries" (likely those in Basra and Baghdad by the hospitals) the graves had been "marked with a name and regiment," which would have been consistent with Ware's instructions earlier in the war and what we see in the photos of the Partab Singh's cremation in Kantara. Such boards did not exist, however, for "the great

---

<sup>169</sup> R.J. Hilson to General Headquarters, Egyptian Expeditionary Force, 1920, 1/1/7/E/28, CWGC.

majority” of graves scattered across Iraq. Absent markers at burial sites and the supposed decision not to keep any register of cremation locations, permanently marking the Indian graves “in all but a small proportion of cases [will] be impossible.”<sup>170</sup>

Conveniently, this path offered an additional incentive: it saved money. As discussed earlier, sorting through the records for Indian casualties was daunting—and doubly so to then connect said records with individual burials, cremation sites, or cemeteries. Officials also raised concerns regarding the “labour and cost” involved in the exhumation, relocation, and reinternment of isolated Indian graves.<sup>171</sup> It would be far simpler, to allow “individual grave slabs be dispensed with, the surfaces of the cemeteries smoothed over, and collective memorials erected.”<sup>172</sup>

Baghdad’s Alwiyah Cemetery points to the unequal application of this logic. Established shortly after the capture of Baghdad, the cemetery had originally contained Indian and British graves. During the early 1920s, all of the British dead were removed and reinterred in another cemetery in Baghdad.<sup>173</sup> While visible mounds indicated there were estimated to be roughly 450 Indians buried at Alwiya, there were neither grave markers nor records.<sup>174</sup> Earlier in that year, the IWGC had applauded their work on the Western Front, where they had marked unknown graves with headstones engraved with the phrase “known unto God.” This was, they said,

---

<sup>170</sup> Copy of Memorandum N: A-1764/240, September 9, 1918, 1/1/7/E/28, CWGC.

<sup>171</sup> R.J. Hilson to General Headquarters, Egyptian Expeditionary Force, 1920, 1/1/7/E/28, CWGC.

<sup>172</sup> Extract from Report of Inspector of Works, January 1, 1922, 1/1/7/E/28, CWGC.

<sup>173</sup> 28/A25/315/W, January 28, 1925, 1/1/7/E/28.

<sup>174</sup> Minutes of the 67 Meetings of the IWGC, June 11, 1924, 2/2/1/67, CWGC.

“the first time in the history of the world after any great war that true honour has been paid to the dead.”<sup>175</sup> But remarkably, by 1926 the announced that “levelling [was] completed” at the Alwiya Cemetery, safely stripped of any British dead.<sup>176</sup>

### ***Mahpalpur***

1,800 miles away from Iraq, a second memorial honors Raje Ram’s death at the Port of Basra in Iraq. But there too, his individual identity is lost. No longer one of seven men from Mahpalpur who died, in Basra he is included in the 492 members of the 48<sup>th</sup> Indian Pioneers 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion who died with no known grave. Some high ranking officers from the 48<sup>th</sup> Indian Pioneers are listed by name on panels 56 and 67 of the memorial complex in Basra. The rest are given as numerical totals by unit underneath.

The colonial government sought to recognize villages like Raje Ram’s for their contributions to the war effort. In early 1919, the Indian Soldier’s Board (ISB) asked the provincial governments throughout India for a list of worthy villages.<sup>177</sup> Which villages, they inquired, supplied a “considerable number of recruits” in the recent war?<sup>178</sup> They intended to install commemorative plaques in recognition of those villages who had made the greatest contribution to the war effort. It would be far too expensive a proposition, they reasoned, to recognize every village in India who

---

<sup>175</sup> Minutes of the 62 Meetings of the IWGC, January 9, 1924, 2/2/1/67, CWGC.

<sup>176</sup> 6th Annual Report of the IWGC, 1926, 2/1/ADD/626, CWGC.

<sup>177</sup> White officials and a handful of elite Indians headed the new organization tasked with managing the needs of recently returned Indian soldiers and their dependents. On the origins of the Indian Soldiers Board in the context of serving disabled veterans, see Buxton’s Hilary Buxton, “Disabled Empire: Race, Rehabilitation, and the Politics of Healing Non-White Colonial Soldiers, 1914-1940” (Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University - School of Graduate Studies, 2018), especially 302-363, <https://doi.org/10.7282/T3B56P5Q>. See also Tan Tai Yong, *The Garrison State: Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab, 1849-1947* (SAGE, 2005).

<sup>178</sup> No 11-ISB, February 12, 1919, Military File 22B of 1919, CC, DSA.

supplied human capital to the war effort. Therefore, they allotted the tablets based on each province's recruitment numbers. Based on their calculations, Delhi Province could bestow this honor on four of its over 700 villages. Conveniently, Delhi officials identified only four villages that sent more than twenty percent of its men to war.<sup>179</sup> This included Raje Ram's village of Mahpalpur in southern Delhi, from which twenty-two percent of the "male population" enlisted.<sup>180</sup>

Over 300 villages throughout India received nearly identical marble plaques.<sup>181</sup> The location selection criteria suggested that the local community was the target audience. However, the original inscription did not even distinguish an individual village by name. The text would vary only in numbers: the number of men recruited from the village for the war and the number of men who died for their efforts. Only after provincial officials strongly advocated did the ISB plan to include the respective village's name on each plaque. Delhi officials requested that the memorial plaques be in vernacular Indian languages, since in many of the selected villages "few persons, if indeed any, [knew] English." In their case, they stated Urdu as the appropriate language. The ISB, however, claimed that "the importance of uniformity throughout India" necessitated the use of English.<sup>182</sup> Inaccessible to even many of the literate public, these memorial plaques ultimately differentiated between villages in only three

---

<sup>179</sup> H.A. Smith, Deputy Chief Commissioner, to C.A. Barron, Chief Commissioner, December 1, 1919, Military File 3B of 1920, CC, DSA.

<sup>180</sup> It is unclear from the sources whether the "male population" included under-age minors or not.

<sup>181</sup> No 782-ISB, September 18, 1919, Military File 3B of 1920, CC, DSA.

<sup>182</sup> No 1266-ISB, Lieut-Col F.G. Moore, ISB Secretary, to C.A. Barron, December 11, 1919, CC, DSA.

ways: the village's name, the human capital supplied by the village for the war, and the casualties subsequently suffered.

The ISB memorial marked where Raje Ram, son of Kura, had come from, but neither where he had died nor where his body lay. Had he returned home after the war, eventually his family would have marked the end of his life somewhere in Mahpalpur. Raje Ram's Hindu family would carry his corpse to a nearby cremation ground, where his closest male relative would have lit the funeral pyre. And after the flames reduced Raje Ram's remains to ashes, the family would likely spread those ashes along the Ganga River to the east. Instead, an English language inscription reduced his family's loss into an unnamed component in numerical totals.

\* \* \*

There's something alluring about exploring history through physical artifacts. Even when the viewer must be satisfied by photographs of objects on a screen or in a book, the underlying materiality opens up space to connect with and understand the past in a way that purely textual sources might not. The BBC and British Museum's 2010 collaborative project, *The History of the World in 100 Objects* popularized the formula: historical topic + 100 (or 50) objects. In the last ten years over 200 print books have promised readers compelling histories of everything from intellectual property to space exploration, women to ocean liners, Napoleon to gardening, and even the future. Nonetheless, there is a distinctly anglophone orientation to this genre, which includes object guided histories of the Anglo-Boer War, Dunkirk, the Blitz, British crime, Shakespeare, the British seaside, the RAF, and both the Tudors and

Henry VIII. This veritable tsunami of books included at least three publications focused on World War I.

Despite the ambitious scope of these object histories, they reveal that our understanding of the first world war via material objects continues to marginalize the contributions and losses of the Indian army. John Hughes-Wilson's *A History of the First World War in 100 Objects* came out in 2014. The book largely showcases the collections held by London's Imperial War Museum, itself established in 1917 in recognition of the significance of the then still ongoing conflict. Given the institution's rich collections (some of which I have cited in the preceding pages), it would be easy to expect at least a token item connected to one of the more than one million Indians who served the empire during the war. Of the 100 objects covered, *no object is directly tied to the Indian experience.*

Only one object description provides more than passing mention of the Indian army: the walking stick of a British officer in the Indian Army. When Major Alexander J. Anderson arrived at Bombay with fifty recruits from British controlled Burma, they took the same path taken by Raja Ram and the 48th Pioneers less than a year earlier. By autumn, Anderson's unit had joined the 6th Poona Division and were soon thereafter among those trapped at Kut. His personal diary from the siege includes a sketch map of Kut detailing troop and gun locations, as well as two spaces where the conflict's casualties sculpted their physical landscape: the cemetery and rise called corpse hill.

Like Raja Ram, Major Anderson survived the siege itself and the journey to a Turkish POW camp. Perhaps the two crossed paths during those hard months.

According to Hughes-Wilson, after the surrender at Kut:

Anderson took only this gnarled, knotted wooden walking stick. He had it in Kut, he carried it through the terrible march to the camps. And he kept it with him for the next two years in Turkey. It was like Anderson himself, a great survivor.<sup>183</sup>

Anderson ultimately made it home, returning to his work at the Port of Rangoon.

Three photographs of him survive at the National Portrait Gallery. As we know at this point, Havildar Raja Ram of the 48th Pioneers was not so fortunate, not a “great survivor” like Anderson. I wonder what meager items Raja Ram carried out of Kut. I wonder if they were laid with him when he died in captivity in March 1917. Most of all, I wonder what stories we might be able to tell about the past if we included artifacts that represented the experiences of Havildar Raja Ram and the South Asians he served with.

This chapter reorients scholarship on the catastrophic loss of life during World War I in two ways. First, it is geographically rooted in the Mesopotamian Campaign, with only brief engagement with the battlefields of France rather than the more common inverse. Second, it focuses on the burial and cremation of South Asian soldiers and officers, instead of white, Christian, European and American men. In doing so, it challenges the reverence so commonly evoked in the Great War’s commemorative discourse. Despite assurances that by late-1915 the IWGC gave

---

<sup>183</sup> John Hughes-Wilson, *A History Of The First World War In 100 Objects: In Association with the Imperial War Museum* (London, UK: Cassell Illustrated, 2014), 102.

“careful consideration,” the archival record reveals a persistent apathy towards the tens of thousands of Indian casualties, few of whom were laid to rest according to their religious beliefs. Even in those cases where units had documented where they buried or cremated their fallen, the very administrative body charged with the preservation of graves chose to redesignate many of the Indian dead as “missing.” The religious diversity of the South Asian dead allowed officials to excuse strategic neglect under the guise of religious sensitivity and the supposed impossibility of satisfying all religious groups.

## 2. BODIES OF CONTROL

### *Fiji, 1932*

In October 1932, Sajjan Singh and Gurbachan Singh pleaded guilty to the murder of Harran Singh near the west coast of British-controlled Fiji. For their crime, acting Chief Justice CC Howell of the Lautoka Supreme Court sentenced them both to death.<sup>184</sup> From the opposite side of the island, the Samabula Gurudwara Committee petitioned to receive the men's bodies following their executions. The administrators at Fiji's first Sikh temple often looked after new Sikh migrants, who arrived in the area without kin or other local ties.<sup>185</sup> Now the administrators sought permission to take custody of Sajjan Singh and Gurbachan Singh's corpses in order to make funeral arrangements for the men, a responsibility normally undertaken by family members. The Gurudwara Committee's secretary hoped that the colonial government would agree to relinquish custody of "the dead bodies of two Punjabis" so that the temple could act as a surrogate family. If awarded custody of the corpses following execution, the committee could ensure that both bodies were washed, dressed in the sacred symbols of their faith, and burnt to ashes under the open sky while someone read a collection of hymns.<sup>186</sup> Failing that, the Gurudwara Committee sought assurance from the colonial administrators that the prison officials cremate both Sajjan and Gurbachan Singh "in accordance with Sikh funeral rites."<sup>187</sup> In the end, Fiji Governor Murchison Fletcher denied their requests wholesale. Cremation was not an option. Colonial

---

<sup>184</sup> "Indians Sentenced to Death," *Daily Standard*, October 6, 1932.

<sup>185</sup> Gajraj Singh, *The Sikhs of Fiji* (South Pacific Social Sciences Association, 1972), 29.

<sup>186</sup> *Punjab District Gazetteers: Amritsar District, 1947* (Chandigarh: Controller of Printing and Stationary, 1947), 74–75.

<sup>187</sup> Santa Singh Granti for Secretary Gurudwara Committee to Suva Gaol Superintendent, October 20, 1932, IOR/L/PJ/7/476, BL.

officials hanged Sajjan Singh and buried his body in direct violation of the Indian Sikh community's wishes. Gurbachan Singh was luckier. He ultimately avoided the noose when the court commuted his sentence to transportation for life.

When Governor Fletcher refused the Samabula Gurudwara Committee's request, he possessed both paltry few legal precedents to draw upon and a great deal of colonial anxiety about how to treat criminal corpses. He had failed to unearth evidence of any comparable prior request about criminal corpse disposal from the sixty years prior during which Fiji had been a crown colony. Fletcher may not have been intimately familiar with specific the tenets of the Sikh faith, but he understood that many religious communities "attach great importance to the manner of disposing of their dead."<sup>188</sup> Without precedent to guide him, he deferred to legal codes instituted in the nineteenth century. Fiji's 1875 *Criminal Procedure Ordinance* dictated the minimum components for all execution warrants in the colony. In addition to specifying the time and place for each execution, the warrant itself had to provide "direction as to the place of burial of the body of the person executed." In full compliance with these existing statutes, Sajjan Singh's execution warrant had stated that after hanging his body should "be buried in the usual place of interment for condemned criminals."<sup>189</sup> Fletcher maintained that the existing instructions were "definite" and had left him no room for gubernatorial discretion. Until colonial statutes changed, criminals executed in Fiji could not be cremated. The governor's letter

---

<sup>188</sup> M. Fletcher, Governor of Fiji, to P. Cunliffe-Lister, Secretary of State for the Colonies, November 8, 1932, IOR/L/PJ/7/476, BL.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

defended his decision to intentionally and knowingly dispose of a corpse in direct contradiction of the religious beliefs of an entire community.

As this case reveals, the disposal of the criminal dead was a complex issue. On the one hand, Fletcher was wary of introducing new precedent in lieu of official policy in such a geographically remote colony. On the other hand, refusals to honor requests for religiously appropriate corpse disposal could inflame resentment towards the colonial state. By 1932 Gandhian campaigns of mass civil disobedience in India threatened British authority on a global scale. Ghadar Party agents in Fiji held their first public meeting at the gurudwara in Ba District with 300 hundred Punjabi Sikhs attending mere weeks before Sajjan Singh and Gurbachan Singh pleaded guilty.<sup>190</sup> Intelligence officers present at the meeting described a member of the Samabula Gurudwara Committee as urging the crowd to “seek bloodshed” for the Lahore execution of Indian revolutionary Bhagat Singh the previous year.<sup>191</sup> Fletcher worried that with Fiji’s religiously diverse population (including many Hindu and Sikh Indians), it would be altogether too easy for restive elements in the community to perform last rites for a criminal in a public format that doubled as an “opportunity to demonstrate their disapproval of the British law under which he was tried and

---

<sup>190</sup> Fletcher to Cunliffe-Lister, October 26, 1932, CO 83/199/15, Kew; For an excellent account of the Ghadarites and their global resistance movement, see Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2011).

<sup>191</sup> I. Lucchinelli, District Inspector of Ba and Tavua, to Inspector General of Constabulary, September 21, 1932, CO 83/199/15, Kew. In 1931 prominent Hindustan Republican Association member Bhagat Singh was convicted in the Lahore Conspiracy Case and executed for the murder of Assistant Police Superintendent John P. Saunders. On Bhagat Singh as a political icon and folk hero, see Kama Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India: Violence, Image, Voice and Text* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

condemned.”<sup>192</sup> As we shall see later in this chapter, the possibility of the criminal dead becoming tools for anticolonial resistance posed a very real threat to his ability to maintain colonial order.

As he navigated the request from the gurudwara and measured it against existing colonial protocols, Fletcher reasoned that cooperating with families and religious communities could engender sorely needed goodwill, explaining that “there [was] much to be said in favor of the cremation of the bodies of prisoners within the gaol in accordance with their religious custom at the express desire of their relatives.”<sup>193</sup> Anticipating that similar cremation requests could be forthcoming, Fletcher sought authorization from his Colonial Office superiors in London to modify the current law and permit him a minor level of discretion. In an attempt to mitigate the risk of future protests, he proposed erecting a small crematorium within the prison walls. By having the capacity to cremate the dead at the prison itself, the colonial state could honor cremation requests by families and religious communities without relinquishing control of the criminal body. Thus, the government could simultaneously close off the possibility of public funerals transitioning into anticolonial demonstrations and ostensibly maintain a minimal performance of regard for Indian religious traditions surrounding the sanctity of the dead.

The immense geographic range of the British Empire in the 1930s meant that, in addition to considering judicial standards in the metropole, London administrators in turn forwarded Fletcher’s request to India for further clarification. Just as the

---

<sup>192</sup> Fletcher to Cunliffe-Lister, November 8, 1932, IOR/L/PJ/7/476, BL.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

Samabula Gurudwara Committee's request wound its way from the desk of a jail supervisor to the governor of the colony, Fletcher's solicitation eventually landed on the desk of Home Secretary John Gilmore in London. As Gilmore considered Fletcher's situation in Fiji, he too turned to existing legal codes and established precedent. He reasoned that officials in British India, birthplace to multiple faiths that practiced cremation (including Sikhism), had surely encountered and resolved the thorny issue of disposing of religiously diverse and potentially controversial criminal corpses already.

As they exchanged correspondence about criminal corpse disposal, colonial officials in Fiji, London, and India tapped into a complex debate about the limits of death and colonial justice. What constituted the completion of a death sentence? What were the implications of judicial execution on the dead body? Did blood relatives, friends, or a community have a right to the postmortem remains of a convicted felon? Did the criminal corpse always represent the possibility of anticolonial demonstrations? And if so, to what extent did the criminal corpse pose a renewed threat to law and order? Should colonial logics legitimize continued punitive measures after death? And under which circumstances?

In these troubled final decades of the British empire, colonial authorities violated two legal precedents they would also wield as shields to defend their policy decisions. First, by their own established judicial logics, capital punishment was a single and discreet sentence. Following death, a capital punishment sentence was fulfilled and complete; the dead body was not subject to further punitive measures on the basis of criminal conviction. Most corpses were not and could not be property

legally speaking (barring a few select scenarios such as anatomical specimens). Therefore, state custody of a corpse following judicial execution was not analogous to ownership rights. While the state held the authority to enact judicial execution on certain seditious subjects, the very act of killing a convicted criminal was precisely what transferred that individual beyond the domain of colonial power.<sup>194</sup> At the same time, growing anticolonial movements revealed further limitations of colonial state power over not only the living, but over the dead as well. The inability to control the dead was particularly hazardous when the bodies in question belonged to politically contentious figures. As we will see later in this chapter, the circumstances of death can render individuals a more powerful threat to the state than the circumstances of their lives.<sup>195</sup> Fletcher was willing to cremate criminal corpses so long as the bodies remained under his careful control and within the confines of the jail. But to do so, he and his counterparts in India and London needed to justify maintaining control (though not necessarily punishment) over the potential of the unruly colonized criminal dead.

This chapter interrogates the fates of the criminal dead in late colonial British India as it relates to the boundaries of juridical power. Beyond a distinction between policy as imagined versus policy as experienced, my research shows that conceptions of the colonial state's sovereignty over the dead was being actively reformulated as the

---

<sup>194</sup> Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 12.

<sup>195</sup> In her analysis of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, Shatema Threadcraft has shown how race and gender are potent factors in whether and to what extent the circumstances of death imbue an otherwise unknown individual with political meaning. See Threadcraft, "North American Necropolitics and Gender."

corpses of those who were executed or died in jail gained new purpose amid anticolonial mass demonstrations. The chapter first establishes a legal chronology of legislative acts and court law from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Just as Fiji's 1875 *Criminal Procedure Ordinance* guided Fletcher in 1932, a limited set of legal landmarks informed British administrators debating colonial policies on corpse disposal in Indian prisons—particularly in the context of capital punishment cases. However, the “rule of colonial difference” undermined any veneer procedural neutrality.<sup>196</sup> In the second section, the procedural content of provincial prison manuals renders visible the extent of what ground-level magistrates and jail administrators throughout the colony were empowered to do with the corpses of those who died in jail, whether from execution or from illness, suicide, or injury. These materials represent the authoritative documents to which individual superintendents and jailers referred. Prison manuals defined their responsibilities and provided a modicum of legal shelter should anyone challenge their decisions (such as refusing a family's request for a corpse after execution). At the same time, official policies do not accurately reflect the whole picture. These manuals present ideal operations as imagined by the authors and as cited by the prison officials. Together, these materials reveal the incarcerated Indian dead as a critically important, but moving target in the project of sustaining colonial legitimacy.

---

<sup>196</sup> Chatterjee introduced this term as a summation of the foundation of colonial state power: “preservation of the alienness of the ruling group.” See Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, 10.

## (Non)Existing Statutes

Judicial execution was not always a single, discreet sentence in the British criminal justice system. A provision in the 1751 Murder Act codified postmortem desecration of the convicted murderers in England. Following execution, the bodies of those not turned over for public anatomical dissection were gibbeted in public view.<sup>197</sup> The act intentionally denied the executed dead the dignity of a proper burial, whether they were dissected “until there was nearly nothing left” or hung by chains to decay on display for many years.<sup>198</sup> For the Christian faithful, this provision in the criminal code came with an additional potential threat: denying the deceased the opportunity of salvation.<sup>199</sup> But by the mid 1830s, the public in England no longer found this legalized mistreatment of the British dead tenable, even following a murder conviction.

In 1832 the Anatomy Act removed dissection from the criminal justice system and provided the grounds for families to claim the remains as the family’s property—technically.<sup>200</sup> The act stipulated that anatomists and medical schools could receive the unclaimed dead bodies of the poor (including prisoners) for dissection. In doing so, this legislation provided the legal foundation for one of the only legal exceptions to the prohibition on dead bodies as property in the UK and British India (and which becomes relevant again in chapter 5). Bodies designated for educational purposes (like

---

<sup>197</sup> Murder Act, 1751, 25 Geo 2, c. 37. For more on postmortem punishment of criminal corpses in early modern England, see Sarah Tarlow, *Harnessing the Power of the Criminal Corpse* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018); Floris Tomasini, *Remembering and Disremembering the Dead: Posthumous Punishment, Harm and Redemption over Time* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017).

<sup>198</sup> Tarlow, *Harnessing the Power of the Criminal Corpse*, 88.

<sup>199</sup> Although Christian doctrine does not mandate burial of an intact body for resurrection, there was a widespread belief in the necessity of a decent burial. See Tarlow, 88–89.

<sup>200</sup> Anatomy Act, 1832, 2 & 3 Will. 4, c 75.

medical training or museum collections) were designated as anatomical subjects, and thus were a recognized exception to the rule: anatomical subjects could be privately owned. Other bodies, however, could not be private property. The Anatomy Act's passage meant that the criminal corpse's fate was no longer the prerogative of court sentencing. When Parliament repealed the Murder Act's provision for gibbeting corpses in 1834, it was strictly a formality. From this point forward, death was the ultimate and final punishment exerted by the state in Britain. However, the repeal of the Murder Act did not stipulate what should happen to the criminal corpse—only that the dead body itself could not be subject to further punitive measures.

Two legislative acts in the 1860s standardized burial for criminal corpses. First, the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act maintained that the Murder Act mandated “the body of every person executed for murder shall be *buried* within the precincts of the prison” where they were last confined (emphasis added).<sup>201</sup> Seven years later the 1868 Capital Punishment Amendment Act similarly stated that “the Body of every Offender executed shall be *buried* within the Walls of the Prison which in which Judgment of Death is executed on him” (emphasis added).<sup>202</sup> In the absence of a “convenient Space” within the prison walls, the act empowered prison officials to designate an alternative location for earthly interment. The wording was unambiguous: the criminal dead were to be buried.

By consistently mentioning only a single means of disposal (burial), the records reveal how even the possibility of an alternative disposal method for the

---

<sup>201</sup> Offences Against the Person Act, 1861, 24 & 25 Vict, c. 100.

<sup>202</sup> Capital Punishment Amendment Act, 1868, 31 & 32 Vict, c. 24.

criminal dead remained outside the scope of legal imagination at the time. The omission of any possibility of cremation from criminal justice legislation drafted in Europe in the 1860s is not in itself surprising. Into the latter half of the nineteenth century, the British public viewed cremation as an archaic relic turned medical oddity. It was not until the early twentieth century that this conception of cremation transmogrified into a technological triumph of modern sanitation.<sup>203</sup> Amid public scandals over pauper funerals, in the 1860s requiring burials already reified the humanity of executed convicts in a small way.<sup>204</sup> Or, more specifically, it represented an effort to reify the humanity of only certain dead. While many religious communities bury their dead, British legislators had a white Christian public in mind. The provisions of both Offences Against the Person Act and the Capital Punishment Amendment Act were certainly not created with those for whom burial did not represent a dignified end in mind.

By the interwar period, high-level administrators relied heavily on these nineteenth century laws in Britain to define the standards of capital punishment through the empire. As with the ordinance in colonial Fiji cited by Governor Fletcher in 1932, neither the Offences Against the Person Act nor the Capital Punishment Amendment Act technically barred cremation outright. But London administrators noted that both acts explicitly stated that the bodies of executed criminals “shall be

---

<sup>203</sup> P. Jupp, *From Dust to Ashes: Cremation and the British Way of Death* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2006).

<sup>204</sup> However, in his examination of potter’s fields in São Paulo, Brazil, Graham Denyer Willis has demonstrated that burial alone is not enough. See Graham Denyer Willis, “The Potter’s Field,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 60, no. 3 (July 2018): 539–68. On the unwanted dead in modern Europe (both paupers and criminals), see Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead*, 312–361.

buried” grounds of the prison.<sup>205</sup> Without a provision for any alternative disposal method, their hands were tied. Beyond ensuring accurate delivery of relevant legislation, the office conveyed no additional suggestions or opinions on the matter. When the colonial office officials looked for comparable instances of “this question [having] been raised in any other [British] Colony,” they returned empty handed.<sup>206</sup> As a result, Gilmore’s office concurred with Fletcher’s interpretation of the status quo and agreed that “it would not be possible under existing law for the body of a person who has been executed to be cremated.”<sup>207</sup> Since Fletcher’s original dilemma involved the religious practices of Sikh migrants from subcontinent, the Colonial Office then turned to their counterparts in India.

The British in India had employed corpse desecration as retribution on multiple occasions in the colony against transgressors. Over thirty years after the Anatomy Act had ostensibly ended the practice of postmortem punitive measures in Britain, the 1854 Moplah Act authorized the burning of executed corpses of convicted “Moplahs” (so named after the members of supposedly “fanatical” Muslim community along the Malabar Coast).<sup>208</sup> The policy represented a complete divergence from the accepted norms around criminal corpse disposal in the colonies and in the metropole.

---

<sup>205</sup> No 486,483/5, Blackwell to Colonial Office Undersecretary, January 23, 1933, IOR/L/PJ/7/476, BL.

<sup>206</sup> Internal Memo, December 23, 1932, File 93477: Disposal of Prisoners’ Bodies, CO 83/199/15, Kew.

<sup>207</sup> No 486,483/5, Blackwell to Colonial Office Undersecretary, January 23, 1933, IOR/L/PJ/7/476, BL.

<sup>208</sup> Mark Condos, “‘Fanaticism’ and the Politics of Resistance along the North-West Frontier of British India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58, no. 3 (2016): 717–45; Santhosh Abraham, “Constructing the ‘Extraordinary Criminals’: Mappila Muslims and Legal Encounters in Early British Colonial Malabar,” *Journal of World History* 25, no. 2/3 (June 2014): 373–95. For the full text of the act itself, see ‘Act No. XXIII of 1854, An Act for the Suppression of Outrages in the District of Malabar’, in William Plumbridge Williams, ed., *The Acts of the Legislative Council of India, Relating to the Madras Presidency, from 1848 to 1855: With an Abstract of Each Section, and an ... Index* (Madras: Church of Scotland Mission Press, 1856), 293–96.

The act effectively legalized the intentional burning of only certain criminal corpses, by allowing for the disposal of so-called “fanatic” dead bodies in a way specifically chosen to be contrary to the traditions of Islam. As with Christians in early modern Britain, nineteenth century Muslims in British India practiced varied and complex corpse disposal traditions even though the Quran itself does not specify how to handle Muslim corpses.<sup>209</sup> Incineration closed off all possibilities of an afterlife. Therefore, the act sought to both deter new would-be rebels, and leverage Muslim religious beliefs in order to inflict postmortem punishment on the convicted by barring any possibility of an afterlife and entrance to paradise.<sup>210</sup>

The practice of burning “fanatic” corpses persisted into the twentieth century, but more widely known were the egregious acts of British revenge for the Uprising of 1857, including the flagrant display of unburied, unburnt corpses as “visible symbols of British authority.”<sup>211</sup> Artfully arranged scenes of scattered bones in photographs immortalized a narrative of carnage and disregard for the Indian dead who violated colonial authority.<sup>212</sup> For the most part, the British reserved violation of the dead for scenarios outside the standard criminal justice system—even going so far as enshrining “fanatic” as a specific and consequential legal term that placed those so-labeled in realm of juridical exception.<sup>213</sup>

---

<sup>209</sup> Leor Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society* (Columbia University Press, 2007), 182–90, 197–233.

<sup>210</sup> Mark Condos, “Licence to Kill: The Murderous Outrages Act and the Rule of Law in Colonial India, 1867–1925,” *Modern Asian Studies* 50, no. 2 (March 2016): 510. On culturally targeted forms of punishment in the British Empire, see also Wagner, “‘Calculated to Strike Terror.’”

<sup>211</sup> Kaushik Roy, “The Beginning of ‘People’s War’ in India,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 19 (2007): 1721.

<sup>212</sup> Chaudhary, *Afterimage of Empire*, 73–106.

<sup>213</sup> Elizabeth Kolsky, “The Colonial Rule of Law and the Legal Regime of Exception: Frontier

This state of exception legitimized punishments that continued after death only for criminals deemed to be fanatics.<sup>214</sup> For state sanctioned executions that were neither encompassed by the Moplah Act nor the 1867 Murderous Outrages Act (derived directly from the Moplah Act), the courts complied with Britain designation in the 1830s that the criminal corpse could not be legally subject to further punishment.<sup>215</sup> All other cases fell outside the special scope of the fanatic exception and thus were without the possibility of intentional, lawful desecration. For those technically unexceptional executions, the question remained: what were the limits of judicial discretion in determining the appropriate way to dispose of a criminal corpse?

### **“Forfeit to the law”**

The answer relied upon determining who could legally claim the custody of a corpse, and in turn determine the place and means of disposal. The directions regarding burial locations in the Offences Against the Person Act and Capital Punishment Amendment Act in Britain implied to colonial officials that “bodies of executed criminals are forfeit to the law, and their return can be and is refused.”<sup>216</sup> In this way, capital punishment cases were distinct exceptions to the standards of English law at the time, which charged the executors of the deceased with the duty to and right of disposal of the corpse.<sup>217</sup>

---

‘Fanaticism’ and State Violence in British India,” *The American Historical Review* 120, no. 4 (October 2015): 1221.

<sup>214</sup> On the state of exception and its significance in the erasure of rights, see Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>215</sup> For the full text of the act itself, see ‘Murderous Outrages in the Punjab, Act No. XXIII of 1867’, in William Theobald, *The Legislative Acts of the Governor General of India in Council from 1834 to the End of 1867*, vol. V (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Company, 1868), 463.

<sup>216</sup> H.G. Stokes, February 17, 1909, Proceedings No 22-24 of April 1909, Jails-A, Home, NAI.

<sup>217</sup> Earl Of Halsbury, *The Laws of England*, vol. III (London: Butterworth & Co., 1908), 404–6.

The landmark case, upon which colonial administrators in India relied, originated in a cremation dispute, and became tied to the eventual legal foundations of funeral cremations in Britain. In the 1882 case *Williams v. Williams*, Welsh cremation proponent Henry Crookenden had willed his body to his friend and sister-in-law Eliza Williams with the expectation that she would cremate his body. His instructions also noted that his heirs should reimburse Williams for any expenses incurred fulfilling his wishes. Against the wishes of Crookenden's children and wife, Williams eventually succeeded in exhuming Crookenden's body, shipping it out of the country, and cremating his remains abroad.<sup>218</sup>

She was less successful afterwards in her suit of Crookenden's heirs for reimbursement. In the judge's decision against Williams, he ruled "there can be no property in the dead body of a human being" and therefore its disposal cannot be willed.<sup>219</sup> After death, an individual's wishes regarding their bodies were not necessarily binding under existing law with one notable exception. The Anatomy Act of 1832 and the later Anatomy Act of 1871 both provided for individuals to plan for their bodies to be available for anatomical dissection. Consequently, anatomical dissection remained the only way a person could legally dictate the fate of their mortal remains. *The Laws of England* explained that these acts provide "statutory provisions

---

<sup>218</sup> It is difficult to summarize the particularities of *Williams v. Williams*, which included exhuming a corpse under false pretenses and the clandestine export of the body to Italy. Crookenden's heirs only learned about the cremation when they read about it in the newspaper. Heather Conway has written extensively on this court case. See especially her chapter "*Williams v. Williams* (1882): Succession Law Rules and the Fate of the Dead," in *Landmark Cases in Succession Law*, ed. Brian Sloan (New York: Oxford, 2019), 249–64. See also Stephen White, "A Burial Ahead of Its Time? The Crookenden Burial Case and the Sanctioning of Cremation in England and Wales," *Mortality* 7, no. 2 (July 2002): 171–90.

<sup>219</sup> *Williams v. Williams* (1882) 20 Ch D 659, 661-662. In

enabling a person to give effective directions” in this regard.<sup>220</sup> Notably, giving directions for a body to be turned over for anatomical dissection was *not* a matter of willing property. Other laws pertaining to private ownership were inapplicable since a dead corpse was not property and thus could not be owned. Corpses themselves existed in their own space of legal exception.

Several key cases around post-execution corpse disposal emerged in connection with anticolonial radicals and revolutionaries convicted for treason in British India. In 1899, the Bombay Government dismissed complaints from the surviving members of the three condemned Chapekar brothers.<sup>221</sup> Even though authorities had handed over the youngest brother’s body following his execution, prison authorities had refused the family’s request for the last brother after his hanging on May 12, 1899. It is unclear from the records what changed in the ninety-six hours between one Chapekar brother’s hanging and another. The colonial state’s refusal to hand over Balkrishna’s body was not part of his criminal sentence, but it did deny the family the ability to ensure he was cremated “according to Hindu custom” following his execution for murder.<sup>222</sup>

Later, Parliament took interest in a different case altogether, one in which the body of the condemned convict had indeed been handed over his relatives. In November 1908, the British House of Commons demanded an explanation following

---

<sup>220</sup> Earl Of Halsbury, *The Laws of England*, III:405.

<sup>221</sup> On the crimes and conviction of Balkrishna, Vasudeo, and Damodar Chapekar, see “The Chapekar Brothers” in *Source Material for A History of the Freedom Movement of India*, vol. II (1885-1920) (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1958), 335–84.

<sup>222</sup> “Disposal of the corpse of the executed criminal Balkrishna Hari Chapekar,” Judicial Home B Proceedings No 197-198, December 1899, IOR/P/5657, BL. Also, *Source Material for A History of the Freedom Movement of India*, II (1885-1920):381.

the funeral of Kanailal Dutta, after his hanging for the murder of a witness in the Alipore Conspiracy Case.<sup>223</sup> Arthur Fell, MP from Great Yarmouth, asked how the Government of India planned to alter its policies to prevent future spectacles:

I beg to ask the Under-Secretary of State for India if the body of the murderer Kanai, who was hanged in Alipore gaol on the 10th instant, was allowed to be carried in a procession to the funeral pyre where it was burned with honour, and a funeral oration delivered amidst shouts of victory to Kanai; and, if so, if the Government will arrange that the bodies of those executed should be buried or burned within the precincts of the gaol as in England.<sup>224</sup>

Officials tried to reassure the members that news of the funeral spectacle had been severely exaggerated. Even so, Bengal's Deputy Inspector-General of the Police, F.C. Daly, later described Dutta's funeral as "an extraordinary scene."<sup>225</sup> During the procession to Kalighat for Dutta's cremation, "crowds thronged the road" and complete strangers pressed forward, reaching out to touch the bier, to make physical contact with the corpse of revolutionary martyr Kanailal Dutta.

Daly revealed that how Dutta's body evoked a mass appeal that to him transcended caste and class boundaries. Women of "a highly respectable class" wailed in public over the loss of someone of "humble origin, a weaver by caste." Following the funeral, Calcutta developed a thriving black market trade in his supposed ashes. The public's outpouring of admiration inspired at least one false confession by a man who aspired to "have a funeral like Kanai Lal Dutta's."<sup>226</sup> Rather than his execution

---

<sup>223</sup> On Kanailal Dutta's trial, execution, funeral, and significance as the "second hero" of the revolutionary movement against the British, see Durba Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists: Political Violence and the Colonial State in India, 1919-1947* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 71–72.

<sup>224</sup> House of Commons Debate, November 16, 1908, Vol 196 cc866-7.

<sup>225</sup> Daly, "Notes on the Growth of Revolutionary Movement in Bengal," August 7, 1911, in Amiya K Samanta, ed., *Terrorism in Bengal: A Collection of Documents on Terrorist Activities from 1905 to 1939*, vol. 1 (Calcutta: Government of West Bengal, 1995), 33.

<sup>226</sup> Daly, "Notes on the Growth of Revolutionary Movement in Bengal," 33.

servicing as a warning, the alleged Alipore bomber and convicted murder became inspiration to would-be revolutionaries.<sup>227</sup> Dutta's postmortem resilience undermined colonial efforts to use the death sentence as a deterrent.

In response to the "wild scene" at Dutta's funeral, the Government of Bengal revised procedures for corpse disposal after execution, as did several other provinces eager to avoid their own scandal. They believed that they could disincentivize other young people from emulating Dutta by decreeing that all future criminal funerals would be closed to the public. In his report, Daly argued that doing had already been effective: in the three years following Dutta's funeral the bodies of those "executed for political murders" in Bengal were disposed of within the jail grounds and "all demonstrations of the kind were prohibited."<sup>228</sup> While he understood it was not a panacea, he was adamant this policy minimized copy-cat terrorists.

Despite Daly's confidence, other officials felt less certain about Bengal's revised policy. Only a decade after the judicial department dismissed complaints from a family denied access to Balkrishna's corpse in Bombay, their colleagues in the Home Department questioned the legal standing for keeping his body. The colonial jurists evaluating Bengal's proposed rules found no comparable legal provisos in India delineating the responsible parties for corpse disposal that were comparable to those in England. The India's Prisons Act (Act No. 9 of 1894) did not apply, since it only dealt with the question of death in prisons in terms of documentation. Both the Moplah Act and Murderous Outrages Act provided the legal foundations for exceptional cases of

---

<sup>227</sup> Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire*, 287.

<sup>228</sup> Daly, "Notes on the Growth of Revolutionary Movement in Bengal," 44.

criminal corpse disposal, they did not attend to the legal frameworks applicable in unexceptional scenarios.











	LEGAL MILESTONE	LOCATION
1752	Murder Act	Britain 
1832	Anatomy Act	Britain 
1854	Moplah Act	India 
1857	Uprising of 1857	India 
1861	Offences Against the Persons Act	Britain 
1868	Capital Punishment within Prisons Act	Britain 
1871	Anatomy Act 2	Britain 
1875	Criminal Procedure Ordinance	Fiji 
1877	Murderous Outrages Act	India 
1882	Williams v Williams	Britain 

Figure 2.6: Chronology of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century legal milestones informing criminal corpse disposal policies in British controlled India and Fiji during the twentieth century.

In the absence of applicable legislation in India, Deputy Legislative Secretary Richard Sheepshanks held that any court cases should default to English law.<sup>229</sup> A thorough and experienced legislative draftsman, John Molesworth Macpherson disagreed with his deputy. The Legislative Secretary questioned whether there were any legal grounds for dictating the postmortem fate of an Indian executed by the state. Without an Indian law “corresponding to section 6 [of the 1868 Capital Punishment Amendment Act] ... it is extremely doubtful whether we have the right to dispose of the bodies even of executed criminals.”<sup>230</sup> Macpherson further questioned the legality of the government withholding corpses on the grounds that capital punishment was a discrete sentence that was completed with death:

On execution of the death sentence the requirements of the law have been

<sup>229</sup> R. Sheepshanks, February 25, 1909, A Proceedings No 22-24 of April 1909, Jails, Home, NAI.

<sup>230</sup> J.M. Macpherson, February 26, 1909, A Proceedings No 22-24 of April 1909, Jails, Home, NAI.

carried out and it is not apparent to me on what legal grounds the prison authorities can resist the claim of their relatives to remove their bodies for burial or cremation.<sup>231</sup>

This claim by Macpherson suggests that by refusing the family the right to dispose of the body, the colonial authorities would be inflicting extrajudicial punitive measures on the dead and their relatives. His concerns allude to the rise and fall of England's own practice of punishing the corpses of convicted murderers, long since concluded by the time he was writing.

British officials recognized that traditions surrounding corpse disposal were often closely tied to religious beliefs in an afterlife. As shown earlier in the chapter, legislative acts in both India and England weaponized Christian and Muslim beliefs about burial of the intact body as a religious imperative. Therefore, Macpherson likely understood that knowingly disposing of a body in a way contrary to the person's religious tradition constituted the exertion of further punishment on the offender beyond execution. At the same time, refusing to turn over the body to an individual's relatives denied families access to rituals of mourning and exacerbated their grief.

Nonetheless, the specter of funerals merging into anti-colonial protests loomed large in the imaginations of Macpherson's colleagues. Heedless of legal footing, they advocated even more expansive policies that empowered local officials to turn over (or not) the bodies of the dead. One British administrator, H.A. Stuart, categorized potential prisoner corpses based on their legal standing at the time of death: 1) civil prisoners, 2) under-trial prisoners, and 3) convicted prisoners. He further split the

---

<sup>231</sup> J.M. Macpherson, February 26, 1909, A Proceedings No 22-24 of April 1909, Jails, Home, NAI.

latter group (those already convicted by the court) into two segments: those executed by the state and those dying of causes other than capital punishment while serving out their sentences. Most of his colleagues agreed that while it would be “most improbable that any ‘demonstration’ of an objectionable kind would be made over a deceased debtor,” the other categories were less readily dismissed as non-threatening—particularly a prisoner under trial.<sup>232</sup>

Neither the 1894 Indian Prisons Act nor English law provided any obvious legal answers as to how these archetypal criminal corpses should be disposed of. Stuart’s decision to organize them in this manner was based on the fact that elsewhere in the body of colonial laws, procedures distinguished between the category of crime, those under trial, and those already convicted by a court of law. In direct opposition to Macpherson’s misgivings, Stuart imagined a scenario in which Kanailal Dutta had died before his conviction and subsequent execution. He confidently asserted that in such an instance “there would certainly have been a demonstration” as soon as Dutta’s body was no longer in police custody.<sup>233</sup> In other words, he understood that the risk of demonstrations disrupting public order was not confined to funerals following judicial executions.

### **Jail Manuals**

While the Colonial Office was largely unfamiliar with the question of prisoner cremation raised by Fiji Governor Murchison Fletcher in 1932, prison administrators in India were well acquainted with a diversity of funeral practices, as they obsessed

---

<sup>232</sup> A.W.J. Talbot, February 16, 1909, A Proceedings No 22-24 of April 1909, Jails, Home, NAI.

<sup>233</sup> H.A. Stuart, February 18, 1909, A Proceedings No 22-24 of April 1909, Jails, Home, NAI.

about how to count the deaths of those who were kept in carceral custody. Showing that the colonial government was adequately managing the death rate of prisons became critical to establishing and upholding the colonial state's authority. Jail administration in British India remained decentralized and each province established its own standards. By 1918, there were 41 central jails and 174 district jails in the colony, which were in turn regulated by eight manuals (Bihar and Orissa followed the Bengal Jail Manual, and the Northwest Central Province followed the Punjab Manual).<sup>234</sup> Having separated from Punjab in 1912, the Delhi Jail continued to fall under the auspices of the Inspector General of Prisons for the Punjab and thus followed the same manual as its former province.<sup>235</sup>

As early as 1857, Punjab jails allowed for both cremating executed criminals and transferring custody of the corpse. The provincial jail manuals provided a template for certificates of execution, in which the responsible official would “further certify that the body of the said \_\_\_\_\_ son of \_\_\_\_\_ was afterwards buried (or burnt, or given to his relatives or friends as the case may be.)”<sup>236</sup> By the mid 1930s all provincial jail manuals in India (except Madras) included some manner of provision for the possible cremation of executed prisoners within prison grounds and requisite policies for whether or not a body could be returned to the individual's community.<sup>237</sup>

---

<sup>234</sup> Enclosure to Legislative Department Office Memorandum No. 3672, October 28, 1918, Jails B Proceeding No 1 of October 1918, Home, NAI. See also B Proceedings No 207-208 of December 1918, Legislative, NAI.

<sup>235</sup> Internal Memo, File 18-B of 1927, Home Confidential, CC, DSA.

<sup>236</sup> Charles Hathaway, *The Jail Manual for the Use of District Officers in the Punjab* (Lahore: Chronicle Press, 1858), 110.

<sup>237</sup> No 11/F 71/1933-Jails, Joint Secretary to the Government of India to India Office Public & Judicial Department Secretary, March 2, 1933, IOR/L/PJ/7/476, BL.

The fate of the criminalized Indian corpse largely relied upon the answers to three questions: 1) How did the prisoner die? 2) Which religious identity did the prison ascribe to the deceased? 3) Did the local magistrate believe the funeral was at risk of becoming a political protest? Cause of death was always the first deciding factor in the fate of a corpse. Colonial prisons categorized prisoner deaths as falling within one of three categories: infectious disease, judicial execution, or a catchall “other,” which could encompass anything from suicide to heart attack to an extra-judicial killing in police custody. As with many aspects of colonial administration, regulations belabored thorough record keeping: which form to complete and by whom, specific chains of command for communication, and frequency of reports.<sup>238</sup>

In order to ensure accurate record keeping, these manuals often prescribed postmortem examinations for unplanned deaths in prison. In the late nineteenth century, the Home Secretary was concerned when he discovered that the *Jail Manual of the Central Provinces* included no provisions for prisoner autopsies as a matter of course. Shortly after this inquiry, the CP Chief Commissioner M.W. Fox-Strangways amended the manual.<sup>239</sup> The new rule required that the prison’s medical officer should conduct a postmortem “in every case which ends fatally... and he shall record in the case book a full account of the appearances then observed and a statement of the cause

---

<sup>238</sup> On the British reliance on bureaucratic documents to organize colonial realities, see Bhavani Raman, *Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India* (University of Chicago Press, 2012). Matthew Hull’s *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan* (University of California Press, 2012) is essential reading in terms of how we think and write about the function of documents in Modern South Asia.

<sup>239</sup> No 699, M.W. Fox-Strangways to Government of India Home Secretary, January 31, 1899, Proceedings No 53-54 of February 1899, Jails, Home, NAI.

of death.”<sup>240</sup> There was only one noted exception for periods of epidemic illness, during which there would simply be more bodies than the medical officer could possibly examine quickly enough.<sup>241</sup> In such a scenario, he could autopsy one or two bodies as a sort of representative sample.

Corpses of those incarcerated were a recurring and persistent issue for prisons in India, both in terms of how to dispose of these bodies and because managing a population with high mortality rates challenged the vision of a well-functioning colonial administration amid a time of epidemics. With prison facilities commonly losing up to a quarter of its population to disease in normal years (and over half the population in uncommon years), Indian jails in this period were notorious for their “prodigious mortality.”<sup>242</sup> An 1838 report ordered by the Council of India suggested that mortality rates for “road gangs” (prison laborers employed for infrastructure projects) in India were artificially low, and perhaps even wholly “fallacious.” The authors hypothesized that the official numbers only represented convict laborers who perished “under the actual charge of the executive officers” and quite soon after the onset of acute symptoms. Any suffering from chronic conditions were “sent in from

---

<sup>240</sup> Revised paragraph 38 of Chapter III of the *Central Provinces Jail Manual*, Proceedings No 53-54 of February 1899, Jails, Home, NAI.

<sup>241</sup> Sometime in the twentieth century the rule was modified such that the facility’s Medical Officer still certified the cause of death, but only performed a post-mortem examination when the cause of death was in question. *Jail Manual of the Central Provinces & Berar* (Nagpur: Government Press, 1946), 105. The absence of a required autopsy did not equate a complete absence of tracking the cause of death for prisoners. The 1899 *Report on the Jails of the Central Provinces* (Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1899) includes a comparison of prisoner deaths in 1898 and 1899 by prison and by diagnosis, which indicates at least some tracking of the cause of death for prisoners not executed.

<sup>242</sup> David Arnold, “The Colonial Prison: Power, Knowledge and Penology in Nineteenth Century India,” in *Subaltern Studies VIII: Essays in Honour of Ranajit Guha*, ed. David Arnold and David Hardiman (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 167.

the roads in a dying state.”<sup>243</sup> This conclusion hinged on a demographic argument: excess deaths.<sup>244</sup> In an explanatory note, they used Alipore Jail as an example, where approximately 90% of the prisoners have life sentences and therefore “every one of these must sooner or later die in confinement.” By contrast, every member of Alipore road gangs were “temporary prisoners,” most of whom “ought to be released many years before their deaths.” The report went on to argue:

The average age of life prisoners must be ever much greater than the average age of temporary prisoners, and consequently the ratio of deaths amongst the former must ever, *ceteris paribus*, greatly exceed the ratio of deaths amongst the latter. Where the contrary is the case the difference of healthfulness must be excessive.<sup>245</sup>

The committee, whose members included Calcutta’s Chief Justice and several members of the Bengal Civil Service, concluded that the mortality rate ought to be higher amongst the subsection of the prison population with a higher average age and who, by the nature of their sentence, must eventually die while in prison. If a segment of the population with a lower average age and shorter sentences had a higher mortality rate, then some aspect of that group’s condition was at fault. This small portion of the lengthy 1838 report indicated that, by distorting their mortality rates,

---

<sup>243</sup> Report of the Committee on Prison-Discipline to the Governor General of India (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1838), 48.

<sup>244</sup> During the Covid-19 pandemic, the term “excess deaths” has moved into the mainstream as a way to calculate the death toll of the pandemic more accurately, since conventional totals fail to capture undiagnosed cases. Demographers have also employed similar methods to calculate casualties in armed conflicts and genocide. On excess deaths and Covid-19, see “Excess Deaths Associated with COVID-19,” September 9, 2020, [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid19/excess\\_deaths.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid19/excess_deaths.htm). On excess deaths and violent conflict, see Helge Brunborg and Ewa Tabeau, “Demography of Conflict and Violence: An Emerging Field,” *European Journal of Population / Revue Européenne de Démographie* 21, no. 2/3 (June 2005): 131–44.

<sup>245</sup> Report of the Committee on Prison-Discipline to the Governor General of India, 47.

Indian jails in 1830s were obscuring a harsh reality: the work conditions of road gangs was lethal.

Finally, several years following the transition from company to crown rule, the persistently high death rates in Indian jails compelled the Government of India to form a new investigatory committee.<sup>246</sup> This committee's recommendations were far from revelatory. Over a decade earlier, an 1850 administrative board circular warned Punjab's jail superintendents "great mortality may occur in the Jails of these territories, unless speedy arrangements are made to ensure ventilation and cleanliness."<sup>247</sup> Then again, Punjabi jails were not as overburdened by the dead as some of their peer institutions. Whereas Charles Hathaway, Punjab Inspector of Prisons, admonished Theney-sur Jail for the highest mortality rate in the province in 1851 (13.66%), his counterpart in Bombay, C.G. Wiehe, lauded Lahore Jail where "the rate of mortality is low, being about 14 per-cent" in 1863.<sup>248</sup> Nonetheless, following the 1860s, most Indian prisons witnessed a marked improvement in prisoner mortality, corresponding with improved sanitary and medical services.

By the time the *Report of Indian Jails Committee, 1919-1920* was released in 1921, Government of India officials congratulated themselves for having dramatically fewer prisoners die while in custody. The lengthy report compared the Indian jail system to its counterparts throughout Britain's empire and celebrated progress made

---

<sup>246</sup> *Report of the Indian Jails Committee, 1919-20* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1921), 30.

<sup>247</sup> Circular No 14, April 10, 1850, reproduced in Hathaway, *The Jail Manual for the Use of District Officers in the Punjab*, 42.

<sup>248</sup> C.G. Wiehe, *Journal of a Tour of Inspection of the Principal Jails in India Made by the Inspector General of Prisons, Bombay Presidency, in December 1862 and January and February 1863* (Bombay: Education Society's Press, 1865), 54.

even as it proposed new reforms. Per the report, the death rate jails across British India for the decade ending in 1864 was 78.5 deaths per thousand inmates, with the highest rate in Bengali jails at 100.5 deaths per thousand inmates. In the “four years ending 1917” the rates had fallen respectively to 18.55 per thousand and 20.1 per thousand.

The results are the work of a long series of devoted and capable officers, both medical and non-medical, during the last three-quarters of a century, and whatever changes may now be in store, we feel confident that the work they accomplished will always deserve the gratitude of the Indian people.<sup>249</sup>

Remarkably the committee attributed the eighty percent reduction in prison mortality to dedicated servants of the Empire. British rule had overseen an astounding number of non-judicial deaths in colonial jails; David Arnold calculates that disease killed over 40,000 Indians died in Lower Bengal Jails in a single fifteen-year window from 1843-1867.<sup>250</sup> However, the committee’s 1921 publication did not frame the mortality rates in Indian jails as the result of harm being done. Instead, the reduction demonstrated good management rather than less harm. Despite the optimistic tenor, the report recommended a modification to the standard process for counting the criminal dead.<sup>251</sup>

The committee did not approve of all the methods jails employed to reduce their reported mortality rates. At that point in time, administrators could transfer a prisoner to a facility better equipped to provide medical care. In particular, most provinces in British India had established centers of care for tuberculosis cases. If a prisoner died in the first three months following a medical transfer, the cause of death

---

<sup>249</sup> Report of the Indian Jails Committee, 1919-20, 31.

<sup>250</sup> Arnold, “The Colonial Prison: Power, Knowledge and Penology in Nineteenth Century India,” 167.

<sup>251</sup> On the *Report of the Indian Jails Committee* and the advent of “political prisoner” as a distinction for those incarcerated for “patriotic” reasons, see Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists*, 45–50.

determined which facility the death counted against. If the cause of death was the same ailment for which the originating jail's medical officer ordered the transfer, then the jail which the prisoner had left was required to include the death in its annual reporting. However, if the prisoner died of some other ailment, then the death appeared in the receiving jail's records. Once three months had passed, the receiving jail was the sole responsible facility.<sup>252</sup> After several decades of pressure to lower their facility's death rates, a "tendency among subordinates" had developed, in which they "hurr[ied] off every case of tubercle" to dedicated centers elsewhere in the province regardless of whether appropriate to the individual patient or not.<sup>253</sup> The *Annual Report on the Condition and Management of the Jails in the United Provinces* reinforced their supposition to an extent. In it the Inspector-General for prisons in the province noted that, while tuberculosis cases were predominantly "treated in special open wards in all the central jails," many prisoners were released from their prison sentences early on medical grounds.<sup>254</sup> It seems that in order to comply with expectations from top level administrators, jail officials sent prisoners who had contracted tuberculosis out of the facility as soon as possible. They would have been well aware of the three-month rule and knew that if they waited until symptoms became more severe, they risked putting it off too late. Quality of medical care did not

---

<sup>252</sup> Bombay Jail Manual In The Bombay Presidency Part I (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1911), 147.

<sup>253</sup> Report of the Indian Jails Committee, 1919-20, 174.

<sup>254</sup> Annual Report on the Condition and Management of the Jails in the United Provinces, with Tabular Statements, for the Year Ending 1915 (Allahabad: Government Press, 1916), 16-17.

motivate colonial administrators to transfer ill prisoners so much as the risk of scrutiny should prisoners die in their custody.

Jail manuals in India had provided a system of counting prisoner deaths that incentivized the transfer of tuberculosis patients as soon as possible. Many prisoners would have contracted the bacteria while in custody, given the airborne nature of how tuberculosis spreads. The prevalence of tuberculosis in Indian jails was often comparable to crowded urban spaces, in some cases substantially higher. A few short years before the release of the *Report of the Indian Jails Committee*, Indian Medical Service Officer and Lieutenant-Colonel E. Wilkinson explained the high rates in Indian jails thus: "...by far the most important is furnished by the conditions of overcrowding which prevail in cities and in many jails."<sup>255</sup> In other words, the physical conditions of Indian jails contributed to the spread of tuberculosis among the prison population. Wilkinson noted that the ratio of tuberculosis patients in Punjab jails was substantially higher than the rates in the province's cities. Meanwhile, ventilation (the chief measure available to dilute and remove contaminated air) in Punjab prisons had been a persistent concern since the first year of crown rule.<sup>256</sup> In the intervening years, prison manuals charged jail superintendents, medical officers, and their subordinates with daily checks to ensure "nothing exist[ed] therein likely to be injurious to the health of prisoners," placing repeated emphasis on "the adequacy of ventilating arrangements."<sup>257</sup> To reduce their individual facility's tuberculosis death

---

<sup>255</sup> Lieut.-Colonel E. Wilkinson, "Notes on the Prevalence of Tuberculosis in India," *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine* 7, no. Section of Epidemiology and State Medicine (May 1914): 203.

<sup>256</sup> Hathaway, *The Jail Manual for the Use of District Officers in the Punjab*, 42.

<sup>257</sup> *Bombay Jail Manual In The Bombay Presidency Part I*, 36, 39–40, 45, 154–56.

toll, jails neglected measures that would reduce new cases despite mandates in their manuals. Why make structural alterations to physical structures when they could instead send tuberculosis cases somewhere else to die?

This point of contention held echoes of the 1838 committee's critiques, suggesting that 1) prison conditions were killing inmates who otherwise would not have died, and 2) that a sort of mortality-accounting loophole allowed prisons to misrepresent the deadly contagious disease deaths. Among the Indian Jails Committee's many recommendations, they proposed repairing this weakness in mortality accounting. For the remainder of colonial rule in India, reissued manuals included an exception to the three-month rule strictly for tuberculosis cases. If a prisoner moved to a different facility in the province on account of a tuberculosis diagnosis and died at any point following his transfer from tuberculosis, then the death was "borne on the returns of the transferring jail."<sup>258</sup> Death by any other cause should appear on the receiving jail's reports. While many provinces like Bengal and Assam revised their manuals accordingly, carving out an accounting exception strictly for tuberculosis deaths, the United Provinces did not count tuberculosis deaths against the original prison. The Sultanpur Tuberculosis Jail Sanatorium was a purpose dedicated facility from which "high mortality" did not "call for any remark."<sup>259</sup> UP officials encouraged jails throughout the province to transfer tuberculosis patients soon after

---

<sup>258</sup> *The Assam Jail Manual*, vol. I (Shillong: Assam Government Press, 1934), 195–96; *The Bengal Jail Code*, vol. 1 (Alipore: Bengal Government Press, 1937), 326.

<sup>259</sup> Report on the Prison Administration in the United Provinces for 1935 (Allahabad: Printing & Stationary, 1936), 12; Report on the Prison Administration in the United Provinces for 1941 (Allahabad: Printing & Stationary, 1942), 13.

diagnosis so that prisoners could “derive the maximum benefit” from treatment.<sup>260</sup> By all appearances, this decision paid off: in 1938 the United Provinces declared its jails the “healthiest in India.”<sup>261</sup> They likely reduced rampant tuberculosis spread within the jail system by continuing the very practice that was criticized in the 1921 report: rushing tuberculosis cases off at the first sign of the illness.

In Indian jail procedures to minimize further spread of highly contagious diseases, corpse disposal was secondary to disinfecting or destroying material goods. First and foremost, clothing, bedding, and other affects used by the patient were to be “thoroughly disinfected or destroyed” regardless of whether they recovered or died.<sup>262</sup> If deemed necessary by the Medical Officer, the entire cell or ward would be likewise cleansed. Only then did the manuals address procedures for handling the contagious corpse itself. It directed prison officers to first wrap the body in a disinfectant soaked sheet, specifying the solution should be “one part corrosive sublimate in 1,000 parts of water” or comparable “strong disinfectant.” As soon as possible after death, “such corpses should be disposed of with the least possible delay and surrounded with an ample supply of quicklime.” Regardless of the prisoner’s crime, sentence, or political significance, these corpses could never return to their families. If a prisoner’s cause of death was not contagious, the jail could entertain requests by family and friends for the body.

\*\*\*

---

<sup>260</sup> Report on the Prison Administration in the United Provinces for 1941, 12.

<sup>261</sup> *Report of the Expert Committee on Jail Reforms* (Allahabad: Superintendent, Printing and Stationery, 1938), 2.

<sup>262</sup> Rule 1060, Manual for the Superintendence and Management of Jails in the Punjab, 1933, IOR/V/27/171/86, BL.

Note: Nobody can lay claim to a corpse as it is not property. When a prisoner dies, his sentence ceases; it merely remains, if the body is not made over to the friends or relatives of the deceased, to dispose of it in a seemly manner, so that it may not become a nuisance and so as not to shock the feelings of the people.<sup>263</sup>

Whether an executed criminal's family or friends could dispose of the corpse themselves usually depended on the judgment by local colonial officials that there were no "special reasons to the contrary." Relatives could receive the body for private burial or burning only so long as judicial officials deemed it unlikely for the funeral transform into some manner of public demonstration. Bombay's manual was more explicit than most, specifying that those who received the body did so strictly "on the understanding that the last rites are performed in a perfectly private manner without any procession, pomp, public demonstration, or any kind of display."<sup>264</sup> Authorities were under no obligation to cite specific calls for demonstrations or unrest from the community. They needed only to say there was "grounds for supposing that the taking of the dead body out of the jail [was] likely to involve a disturbance of the public peace."<sup>265</sup> For the most part manuals were silent regarding both the administrative application process to receive the body of an executed convict and the physical corpse handoff—with the notable exception of British Burma which the body would be "carried outside the main gate and there delivered over" to waiting relatives.<sup>266</sup>

---

<sup>263</sup> Manual for the Superintendence and Management of Jails in the Punjab, 1933, IOR/V/27/171/86, BL, 375.

<sup>264</sup> Section 590, *Bombay Jail Manual* extract enclosed in No 11 71/33-Jails, IOR/L/PJ/7/476, BL.

<sup>265</sup> Section 1112 in Jail Manual of the Central Provinces & Berar, 358.

<sup>266</sup> Section 825, *Burma Jail Manual* extract enclosed in No 11 71/33-Jails, IOR/L/PJ/7/476, BL.

News of an unexpected death in prison did not always reach the inmate's loved ones quickly. Whereas in Madras requests for a corpse had to be submitted prior to burial, in Punjab there was some flexibility. Friends and relatives of a deceased prisoner in Punjab could apply to receive an already-interred body. At that time, the magistrate would render a decision after soliciting the professional opinion of the jail's Medical Officer whether exhumation would pose a risk to public health.<sup>267</sup> Only the Bihar and Orissa accounted for the possibility of non-local family members collecting the remains of a prisoner dying while in state custody. The manual called for prison administrators to send "timely intimation" to the relatives of prisoners "seriously ill" for the express reason of potential corpse custody.<sup>268</sup> The policy intended that families have fair opportunity to reach the facility and dispose of the body themselves so long as the disease did not qualify as a public health hazard.

If no one came forward to collect an uncontroversial and non-contagious body shortly after death, then the manuals all addressed corpse disposal based on the facility's assessment of the individual's religious identity. In the United Provinces deceased prison inmates were labeled either Hindu, Muslim, or European. The prison would arrange for the "thorough cremation" of Hindu corpses, while the Muslim dead were to be buried. While the UP manual made provisions for burying of European corpses "in the local cemetery with due rites," it was silent on procedures for Indian who were neither Muslim nor Hindu, such as Sikhs or Indian Christians.<sup>269</sup>

---

<sup>267</sup> Section 1032(2) of *Punjab Jail Manual*, extract enclosed in No 11 71/33-Jails, IOR/L/PJ/7/476, BL.

<sup>268</sup> Section 1176 of *Bihar & Orissa Jail Manual*, extract enclosed in No 11 71/33-Jails, IOR/L/PJ/7/476, BL.

<sup>269</sup> Section 520(c) of *United Provinces Jail Manual* extract enclosed in No 11 71/33-Jails, GoI Joint

Punjab regulations simply divided deceased inmates into two categories. Christian corpses were to be, “whenever possible, interred in consecrated ground with the rites of the religion to which he belonged.”<sup>270</sup> All those who were “not a Christian” were to be “cremated or buried in the jail burial ground in accordance with the custom application to the caste to which he belonged.”<sup>271</sup> On one hand, the policy was Eurocentric in its conflation of all inmates as simply either Christian or non-Christian. Alternatively, the Punjab regulations did not bifurcate the categorization of non-Christian funeral practices into Hindus always cremate their dead and Muslims always bury them, as many other contemporary manuals from other provinces did. Instead, it suggested that the corpse be cremated or buried according to the *caste* of the deceased. Similar potential for nuance appeared in Bombay, where unclaimed bodies were to be “disposed of in strict accordance with their religion e.g., Hindus would ordinarily be burnt and Musalmans and Christians would be buried.”<sup>272</sup> The use of the word “ordinarily” may seem a distinction of no great importance. However, the governor’s decision in 1932 Fiji reflects the extent to which many colonial officials constrained their options according to the exact letter of written policies. Thus, Bombay and Punjab’s prison manuals notably allowed for varied practices and did not dictate which to use when.

---

Secretary to Public & Judicial Department Secretary, India Office, March 2, 1933, IOR/L/PJ/7/476, BL.

<sup>270</sup> Extract from Manual for the Superintendence and Management of Jails in the Punjab, IOR/V/27/171/86, BL, 375.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Section 1103 of the *Bombay Jail Manual* extract enclosed in No 11 71/33-Jails, IOR/L/PJ/7/476, BL.

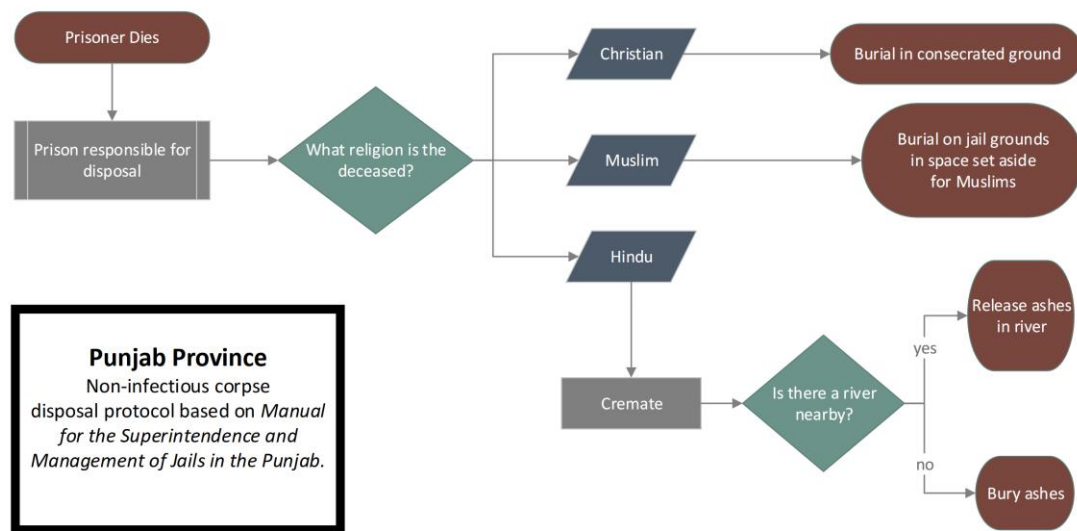


Figure 2.7: Corpse disposal decision tree for Punjab Province Prisons for non-infectious prisoner bodies who were either unclaimed by friends/family or whose funeral could become a political demonstration.

Prison manuals for the Bihar and Orissa and the Central Provinces gave even greater latitude in the written policies for criminal bodies. Neither mentioned a single religious community by name when detailing the appropriate procedures for prisoner corpse disposal. Instead, Bihar and Orissa’s manual required that responsible parties dispose of bodies “according to the religious custom of the deceased.” The Central Provinces manual went a step further by omitting any mention of religion. By specifying corpse disposal “in the manner most consonant with the customs of the tribe or caste of the criminal” the CP guidelines imagined funeral customs as being varied and locale dependent in comparison to other provinces.

In Madras, where burial was the only option, the location of death became an important deciding factor. Out of fourteen facilities, six donated unclaimed inmate bodies to local medical schools for anatomical training. Corpses from Madras Penitentiary went to the Madras Medical College, while those from Madura District Jail, Coimbatore District Jail, and Vizagapatam District Jail went to each

municipality's respective medical schools. The Union Mission Medical School for Women received bodies from Vellore Central Jail. In the event of a youth detainee death from the Borstal School in Tanjore, the Tanjore Medical School received the body for dissection.<sup>273</sup>

---

<sup>273</sup> Note to Section 667, *Madras Presidency Jail Manual*, extract enclosed in No 11 71/33-Jails, IOR/L/PJ/7/476, BL.

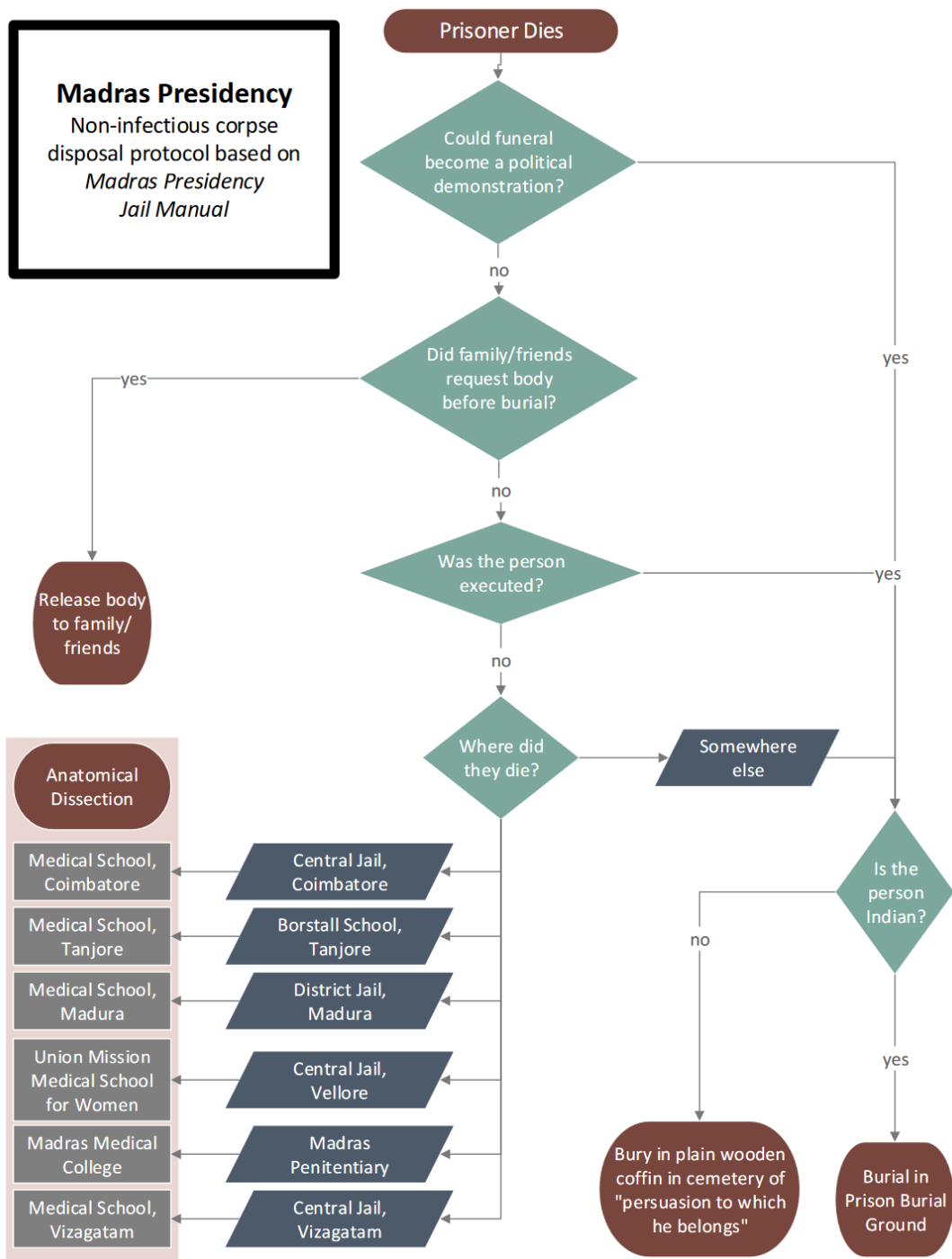


Figure 2.8: Corpse disposal decision tree for Madras Presidency for disposing of non-infectious prisoner bodies.

By the early 1930s, most jail manuals gave the appearance of preemptively assuaging potential accusations of incorrectly performed funerals. They emphasized

that funerals should “invariably” be conducted by prisoners “belonging to the same religion as the deceased” (Bombay), or “of [the dead’s] own religion” (UP).<sup>274</sup> Furthermore, Bombay’s manual stressed that “facilities must always be given for carrying out funerals with decency and with the prescribed religious rites.” Only the Bengal manual included a lengthy section dedicated to religious observances for deceased prisoners. Whereas other manuals assigned other prisoners the task of disposing of unclaimed prison corpses, Bengal required handing the bodies over to local “Muhammadan Burial Associations.” In the absence of such an organization in the vicinity of the prison, the manual listed potential recipients: “heads of mosques, Muhammadan Associations or other responsible Muhammadans.”<sup>275</sup> Similarly, the unclaimed bodies of “non-Muhammadan” Indian prisoners were to be given to local religious or social organizations who “may be willing to undertake the duty” of last rites. The section omits any specific directions dictating the method of disposal because it does not even mention the possibility of the prison itself disposing of the bodies. In order to encourage willing parties to step forward, the section closes by allowing for financial compensation “not exceeding Rs. 10 for each dead body of any community” to cover the corresponding funeral costs.

Indian prisoners advocated on their own behalf and that of their dead.

Although their platform to be heard was limited, their complaints to the 1925 Punjab Jail Enquiry Committee prove that prison manual policies were often not enough to

---

<sup>274</sup> Section 1104 of the *Bombay Jail Manual* and Section 520(a)&(b) of the *United Provinces Jail Manual*, extracts enclosed in No 11 71/33-Jails, IOR/L/PJ/7/476, BL.

<sup>275</sup> Section 692C of the *Bengal Jail Manual*, extract enclosed in No 11 71/33-Jails, IOR/L/PJ/7/476, BL.

ensure that the dead were laid to rest decently. Since at least the mid nineteenth century, Punjab jails had possessed the power to bury or cremate dead prisoner bodies appropriately as illustrated above. However, the 1925 report revealed that, as with sanitary measures, prison manual policies did not necessarily represent reality.

Jail manuals, annual reports, investigative committees, centuries of British legislation, and Governor Fletcher's dilemma in Fiji illuminate colonial criminal corpses as inhabiting a legal grey zone. Colonial officials pursued an elusive framework capable of accounting for every permutation of location, caste, religion, public health risks, cause of death, age, gender, conviction, vocation... They wanted a formula with which to reliably routinize prisoner corpse disposal without controversy, because they were much more concerned with avoiding protests than they were worried about actually respecting the Indian dead.<sup>276</sup> The diversity of disposal practices among Indians thwarted the efforts of British officials, from high level policy makers in London to jail superintendents on far-flung Pacific Island colonies to on-the-ground local magistrates in Delhi. Critically, these records consistently tied the circumstances of prisoner deaths to both tactile and documentary postmortem procedures.

---

<sup>276</sup> This strategy parallels other colonial regulatory efforts to prevent protests over religion in India., such as cow protection. See Sandria B. Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (University of California Press, 1989); Gyanendra Pandey, "Rallying Around the Cow: Sectarian Strife in the Bhojpuri Region, c.1888–1917," in *Subaltern Studies II*, ed. Ranajit Guha (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 60–129. More recently, Shabnum Tejani revisits this history through the lens of emotions in "Cow Protection, Hindu Identity and the Politics of Hurt in India, c.1890–2019," *Emotions: History, Culture, Society* 3, no. 1 (June 2019): 136–57, [https://brill.com/view/journals/ehcs/3/1/article-p136\\_9.xml](https://brill.com/view/journals/ehcs/3/1/article-p136_9.xml).

The potential for public protest or further rebellion increasingly dominated the decision making process over whether to turn over a body after an execution. While the Moplah Act serves as a particularly egregious example of postmortem power, later officials likewise drew the limits of colonial state power to include the criminal dead. They justified their expanded powers by citing 1860s British legislation: Offences Against the Person Act and Capital Punishment Amendment Act. The irony is that both acts are firmly part of a nineteenth-century process to codify death as beyond the reach of the British legal system. That is why each act reiterated the need to bury the criminal dead after execution. Even capital punishment corpses were no longer subject to gibbetting or punitive public dissection as they had been in the past. Regardless of conviction, they were entitled to be buried promptly, whole, and intact—as long as they were in England.

Since the colonial criminal justice system felt entitled to exert power over the incarcerated, it refused to relinquish control after death. Imperial administrators believed that the incarcerated Indian dead posed a danger to the colonial project that the domestic criminal dead in the metropole did not. Colonial officials cited the Offences Against the Person Act and Capital Punishment Amendment Act as rendering judicial execution corpses “forfeit” to the law, in contradiction to their context. They were an exception to the state of legal exception dead bodies existed in: simultaneously possessable, but not property. This interpretation was only a technicality; it provided legal cover for their fear of the criminal corpse’s ability to morph into an anticolonial rallying point. This guiding criteria applied to more than just capital punishment cases. Decades of jail manuals referenced the likelihood of

unrest or public nuisance as ample reason to refuse to hand over a criminal's corpse regardless of cause of death. In this way, an originally narrow state of exception ballooned, becoming ever more expansive in how it redrew the boundaries of juridical control.

This chapter demonstrates how the colonial state experimented decoupled the implications of legislation in the metropole and the colony. The bureaucracy surrounding disposal of the criminal dead (whether burning the bodies of “fanatics,” denying requests to cremate Hindu or Sikh dead, or refusing to hand over the corpse to friends and family) required a legal logic that understood the criminal corpse as occupying multiple realms of exception: simultaneously “forfeit” to the law and not ownable property under the law. Ironically, these exceptions relied on the same parliamentary acts that brought post-mortem punitive measures to an end in Britain. Further, these exceptions delegated the fate of the criminal dead to local officials, who were usually motivated more by performance reviews and ostensible public health metrics, than local norms of mourning and corpse disposal.

### 3. THE REMAINS ABROAD

The Nawab of Rampur was two months shy of his 55th birthday when he finally succumbed to chronic dysentery. Having succeeded his father as the semi-autonomous ruler of the princely state of Rampur when he was only fourteen, Hamid Ali Khan's life was inextricably bound with the urban spaces of the state's capital city (also called Rampur). The city had flourished under his leadership; he earned the moniker "Shah Jahan of Rampur," for his contributions to the city.<sup>277</sup> In addition to investing heavily in public works projects and schools, he built the Hamid Manzil—the city's most iconic building and current home of the Rampur Raza Library. However, Hamid Ali Khan intended to be buried abroad rather than becoming part of the Rampur landscape. His decision broke with generations of tradition.

Since Hamid Ali Khan's family came to power in 1774, almost every nawab of Rampur had been buried within the twenty-mile radius shown (Map 3.6). The state's founder, Faiz-ullah Khan, lay buried just outside the city's Idgah gate.<sup>278</sup> His eldest son, Muhammad Ali Khan ruled for only a few weeks in the summer of 1793 before being deposed by his brother and murdered in his sleep. His short tenure as nawab notwithstanding, Muhammad Ali's grave in a northern Rampur village survived until its 2016 demolition.<sup>279</sup> His son and Rampur's longest ruling nawab, Ahmad Ali Khan, lay in a tomb in the village Nankar, only a few miles north of the capital city.<sup>280</sup>

---

<sup>277</sup> Razak Khan, "The Case of Falling Walls: Politics of Demolition and Preservation in Rampur," *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, no. 20 (2014): 25.

<sup>278</sup> *Gazetteer of the Rampur State* (Allahabad: Government Press, United Provinces, 1911), 93.

<sup>279</sup> *Gazetteer of the Rampur State*, 94; Nazar Abbas, "Probe into Rampur's Graveyard's Desecration," *Times of India*, August 21, 2016, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bareilly/Probe-into-Rampurs-graveyards-desecration/articleshow/53789442.cms>.

<sup>280</sup> *Gazetteer of the Rampur State*, 101–2.

Muhammad Said Khan and Yusef Ali Khan rested in the then recently built imambara at the fort.<sup>281</sup> Hamid Ali Khan's grandfather (Qalb Ali Khan) and father (Mushtaq Ali Khan) had died within two years of each other in 1887 and 1889 respectively, and both lay at the Hafiz Jamal-ullah.<sup>282</sup>

Between 1774 and 1930, only one Rampur nawab was buried outside the confines of a princely state half the size of Delaware.<sup>283</sup> In 1793 the British East India Company forced Muhammad Ali's traitorous brother, Ghulam Muhammad Khan to hand Rampur over to his nephew (Ahmad Ali). Ghulam Muhammad later died in exile in what is now part of Himachal Pradesh, his burial place unknown.<sup>284</sup> Ahmad Ali likely prohibited the repatriation of his uncle's body for burial in Rampur, considering Ghulam Muhammad the architect of his father's murder. In contrast, Hamid Ali Khan died in the city of his birth, Rampur's own Shah Jahan. If Hamid Ali had desired it, his tomb would have become a central landmark in the city to which he had dedicated his life. Instead, before death he had conveyed to his family his "particular wish... that his body should be sent to Mesopotamia for burial."<sup>285</sup> Hamid Ali Khan wanted to be buried in Iraq in the holy city of Najaf—two thousand miles away from Rampur.

---

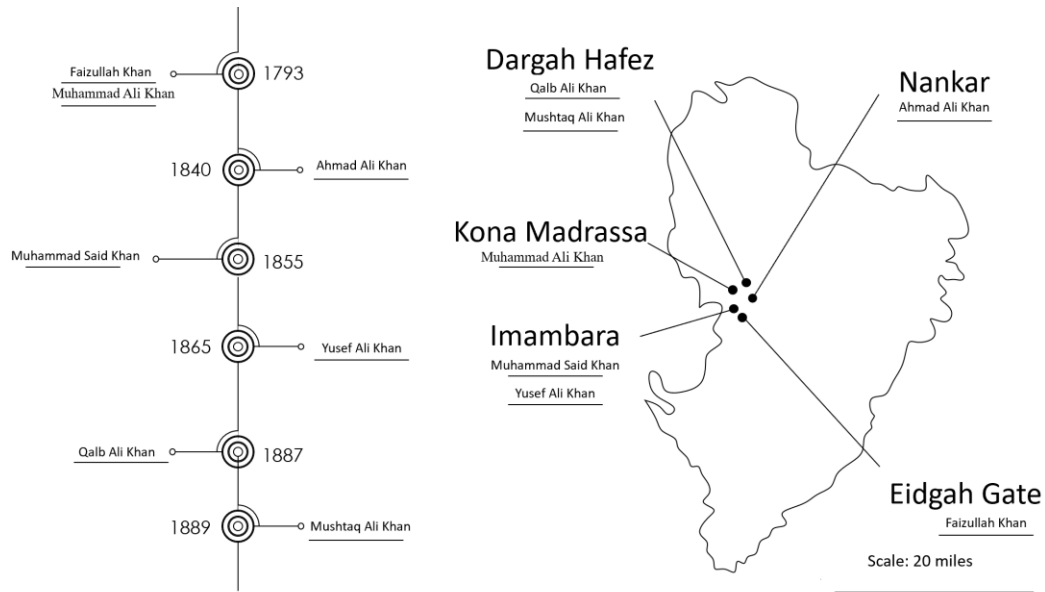
<sup>281</sup> Gazetteer of the Rampur State, 102, 111.

<sup>282</sup> *Gazetteer of the Rampur State*, 112; Mansoor Ahman Siddiqui, "History of the Nawabi Regime of Rampur 1801-1949" (PhD Thesis, Jaunpur, Uttar Pradesh, India, V. B. S. Purvanchal University, 1997), 51.

<sup>283</sup> Following the introduction of Crown Rule in 1858, native rulers retained some level of control in hundreds of small princely states. These represented approximately a third of India's population at the time and 40% of the land.

<sup>284</sup> Gazetteer of the Rampur State, 95.

<sup>285</sup> Abdus Samad Khan to Stubbs, November 18, 1930, File 329 of 1930 Pts. I & II, Political Department, IOR/R/2/771/360, BL.



Every nawab before Hamid Ali Khan lay within a five mile radius.  
 Figure 3.9: Chronology of Rampur nawabs' deaths Map 3.6: Princely State of Rampur with locations of Hamid Ali's predecessors, with the single exception of Ghulam Muhammad Khan.

This chapter considers the place of Indian remains within and across international boundaries. We begin in India looking outwards, with exportation of the Shi'i Muslim dead. Corpse traffic to Najaf and other Shi'i shrine cities in Ottoman controlled Iraq had been a lucrative and thriving industry in the nineteenth century.<sup>286</sup> It relied on a complex transnational network that tied together the public health, fiscal fate, and religious faith of communities throughout the region. In the second section of the chapter, we examine the opposite end of the spectrum: the Hindu and Sikh diaspora, the majority of which were migrant laborers. Far from kith and kin, many never fulfilled their expectation to return home again. It usually fell then to their

<sup>286</sup> Sabri Ateş, "Bones of Contention: Corpse Traffic and Ottoman-Iranian Rivalry in Nineteenth-Century Iraq," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no. 3 (December 1, 2010): especially 529; Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 185–201.

fellow expatriates to plan and provide for their funerals—and to do so without any support from the imperial machine.

### Elites

While Hamid Ali was not the first Shi'i nawab of Rampur, he intended to be the first one buried in one of Iraq's shrine cities. Specifically, he wished to be buried in the same mausoleum as "His Spiritual Guide the late Agha Sayed Kazim Tabatabai" a prominent Shi'i religious leader more commonly known as Kazim Yazdi or Kadhim Yazdi.<sup>287</sup> Islam has a long tradition of graves as sources of blessing (*baraka*), through grave visitation (*ziarat*) for the living and burial near saintly figures for the dead.<sup>288</sup> Kazim Yazdi had himself been buried within the Shrine of Ali Ibn Abi Talib (son-in-law and cousin of the prophet, Ali ibn Abi Talib is regarded as the first Imam by Shi'is and the fourth Caliph by Sunnis) in 1919.<sup>289</sup> Following his murder, Ali ibn Abi Talib had been buried near Kufa at a secret location in order to prevent his enemies from desecrating his grave.<sup>290</sup> The Iraqi city of Najaf later grew around the grave site

---

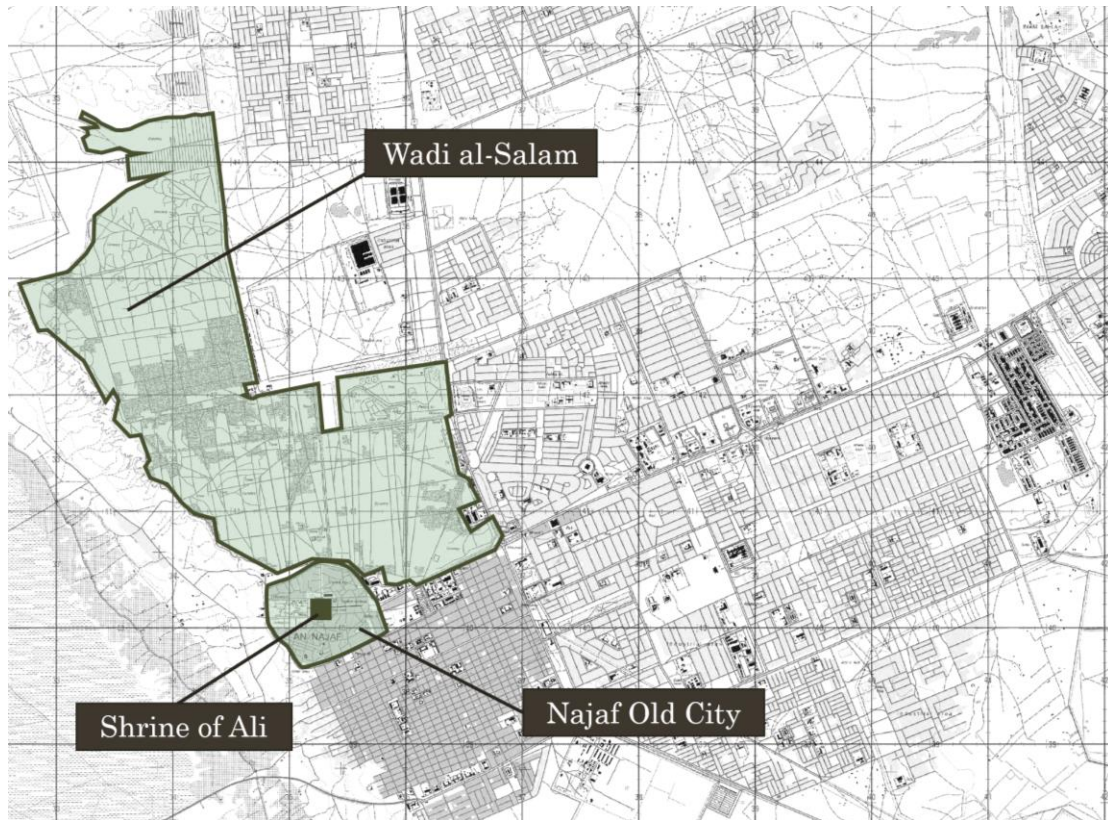
<sup>287</sup> Abdus Samad Khan to Stubbs, September 21, 1930, File 329 of 1930 Pts. I & II, Political Department, IOR/R/2/771/360, BL. Also known as Mohammed Kazem Yazdi

<sup>288</sup> Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 226; Josef W. Meri, "Aspects of Baraka (Blessings) and Ritual Devotion Among Medieval Muslims and Jews," *Medieval Encounters* 5, no. 1 (1999): 68; Dietrich Von Denffer, "Baraka as Basic Concept of Muslim Popular Belief," *Islamic Studies* 15, no. 3 (1976): 170. Rebecca Brown has argued that the British memorial to a 1763 massacre in Patna follows a the logic of *baraka* in her article "Inscribing Colonial Monumentality."

<sup>289</sup> The most comprehensive list publicly available names 152 individuals other than Imam 'Ali as buried within the shrine complex. However, it only lists three individuals in Chamber 47, where Kazim Yazdi's remains lie and Hamid Ali Khan's name appears no where on the list. See archived copy of the list "Personalities Buried in the Holy Shrine - Imam Ali (a.s) Network," Imam Ali Network, accessed February 25, 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210225170703/https://www.imamali.net/?id=2463>.

<sup>290</sup> For an examination of 'Ali's grave from his death until the fourteenth century, see Rose S. Aslan, "From Body to Shrine: The Construction of Sacred Space at the Grave of 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib In Najaf" (Ph.D. dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2014). On the complex relationship between the shrine of 'Ali's and Najaf's urban landscape, see Shubber M. Falah, "The Shrine That Consumed Its Town: The Role of Religion and Politics in Reshaping the Iraqi City of Najaf" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 2018).

(ostensibly identified years later) and benefited from financial support from Indian princely states in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>291</sup>



Map 3.7: Wadi al-Salam, Shrine of Ali, and Najaf Old City.<sup>292</sup>

According to some Shi'i traditions, proximity to Ali's grave offered more than divine intercession. He could "eliminate the ordeal of the grave" altogether and minimize the time "between death and resurrection."<sup>293</sup> For most people, the closest burial option has been Najaf's the Wadi al-Salam cemetery (see Map 3.7**Error! Reference source not found.**). Experts estimate that there are approximately five

---

<sup>291</sup> Juan R. I. Cole, "'Indian Money' and the Shi'i Shrine Cities of Iraq, 1786-1850," *Middle Eastern Studies* 22, no. 4 (1986): 476, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4283138>.

<sup>292</sup> Modified map based on UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, *Military Map of Najaf*, July 6, 2003, 1:15,000, July 6, 2003, Iraq, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/1290274.html>.

<sup>293</sup> Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, 186.

million graves within Wadi al-Salam's six kilometers. Kazim Yazdi and Hamid Ali rank among the elite few for whom burial within the shrine complex itself has been possible.

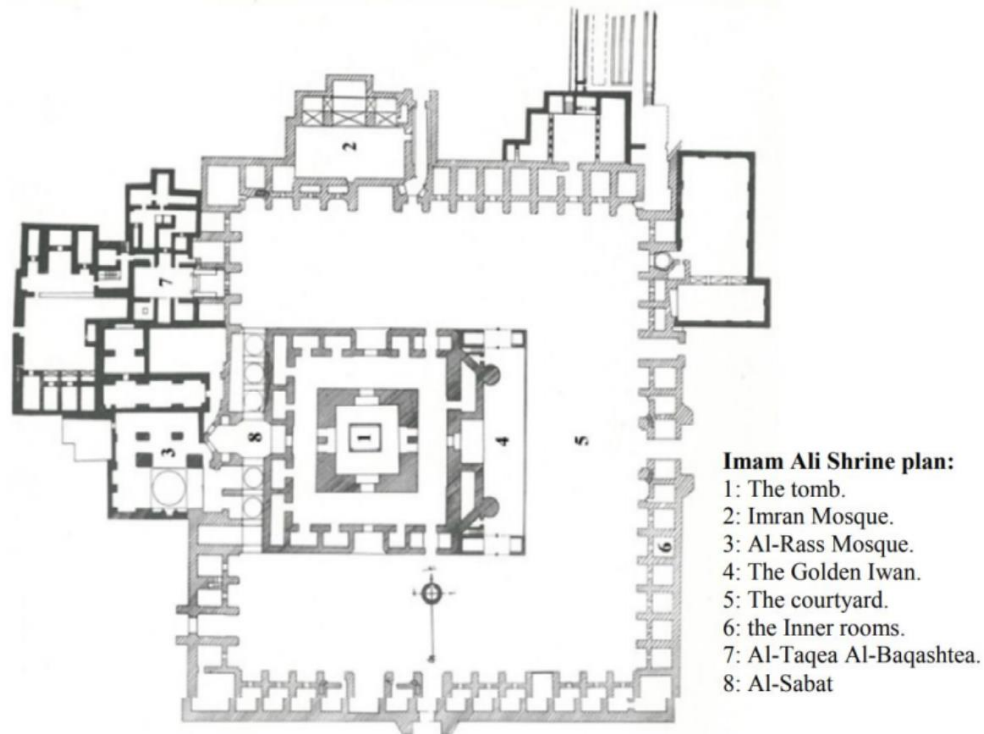


Figure 3.10: Layout of the tomb of Imam Ali in Najaf in 1969.<sup>294</sup> Many small chambers were used for subsequent burials. One of these chambers houses the remains of Hamid Ali Khan and his spiritual guide Kazim Yazdi.

Had Hamid Ali's death occurred a little over a decade earlier, the logistical process would have been more complicated. After the British first wrenched control of Iraq from the Ottomans during World War I, they prohibited pilgrim and corpse traffic since the region was still considered an active theatre of war.<sup>295</sup> The ban, however,

---

<sup>294</sup> S. K. Abid, "Imam Ali Shrine, Institution and Cultural Monument: The Implications of Cultural Significance and Its Impact on Local Conservation Management," vol. 153 (Structural Studies, Repairs and Maintenance of Heritage Architecture XIV, A Coruña, Spain, 2015), 89, <https://doi.org/10.2495/STR150081>.

<sup>295</sup> Telegram 1654, Persian Gulf Political Resident to Secretary of F&P Dept, GoI, May 15, 1917, Nos

was not absolute. Individuals from among India's upper echelons repeatedly sought and successfully secured exceptions to the rule. The ongoing war meant that travel ban exemptions were complex administrative affairs available to the well-connected few. By the time Hamid Ali died in 1930, the bulk of the "foreign transfer of corpses [had] slowly died out."<sup>296</sup> However, the optics of accommodation and the pressures of mass politics made these exceptions possible.

The Indian Government mediated at least two travel exemptions for another princely state leader: the Mir of Talpur. First, in 1918 he took the body of his late vazir for burial in Karbala, another important Shi'i shrine city. Then again, in early 1919 he received a second reprieve from the ban in order to take his elderly mother, Dero, to visit her brother's grave in time for Ashura during the month of Moharram.<sup>297</sup> In her "advanced age" Dero felt it an "imperative religious duty to visit Holy Karbala and especially *as her brother's tomb is there she feels a sort of longing to visit it before death cuts asunder all bonds of affection*" (emphasis added).<sup>298</sup> The access available to members of the elite, such as the Mir of Talpur and Nawab of Rampur, would have been unavailable to most Indian Shi'is. However, their success in securing exemptions from official travel bans relied in large part on their positions of potential influence with the wider Indian Muslim community—including those who could neither bear the

---

14-15B of November 1917, Near East (Secret), Foreign & Political Dept, NAI; Copy of Memorandum No 2270 G, September 2, 1919, File 48 of 1919, Deputy Commissioner Files, DSA.

<sup>296</sup> Sabri Ateş, "Ateş, "Bones of Contention," 532.

<sup>297</sup> When her brother Hussan Ali Khan died in 1907, Dero went to Mecca on Hajj. Five years later, the Mir of Talpur took her uncle's body for final burial in Karbala in 1912.

<sup>298</sup> Translation of Letter from Mir of Talpur, April 24, 1919, Pros August 1920, Nos 38-42, General-B, Foreign & Political, NAI.

financial expense of an international corpse transfer, nor gain the ear of governmental functionaries.

As prominent Muslims in British India, the opinions of the Mir of Talpur and Nawab of Rampur mattered—or, at least, would circulate widely when covered by the Indian press. When the Mir of Talpur sought his second exemption in less than twelve months, provincial officials in Bombay proposed appealing to the highest military authorities to again waive all travel restrictions. They reasoned it was politically expedient because “the testimony of a Muslim gentleman of so high a position as His Highness the Mir to the great improvements in the condition of the country effected during the military occupation, would be from a political point of view, distinctly advantageous.”<sup>299</sup> In other words, it was in the best interests of the British Empire for the Mir of Talpur to speak highly not only of the British in India, but also of the British in Iraq. The Mir anticipated this dynamic in the approval process. In his petition for permission, he simultaneously assured officials that his request placed minimal burden on them and engaged in deft flattery of the British occupation in Iraq:

I shall not trouble the Government for any of my arrangements... I simply require the necessary permission of the Military authorities in Baghdad. God has granted success to British Arms and during my last visit I have seen with my own eyes the great improvements effected by our benign Government and the facilities of travel now have added to my mother's intense desire to perform this sacred ceremony in Mohurrum this year.<sup>300</sup>

British officials in India hoped that a second trip, this time without an ongoing military campaign, would induce the Mir to speak even higher praise.

---

<sup>299</sup> No 3396, May 20, 1919, Pros August 1920, Nos 38-42, General-B, Foreign & Political, NAI

<sup>300</sup> Translation of Letter from Mir of Talpur, April 24, 1919, Pros August 1920, Nos 38-42, General-B, Foreign & Political, NAI.

Within weeks of the war's end concern about local political unrest led the provincial government in the United Provinces to appeal for an end to the ban on pilgrim and corpse traffic to Iraq. An end to the prohibition would foster goodwill for the British among Indian Muslims who were, as one official put it, "disturbed state" at the time.<sup>301</sup> Both UP and Bombay officials felt that for "political reasons" the benefits of dropping the restrictions outweighed any costs. However, hindered by the pace of bureaucratic change, the rules remained in place in May 1919. Wishing to jeopardize neither the Mir's request nor the likelihood of an eventual reopening of pilgrim traffic, Foreign and Political Department authorities temporarily tabled the broader question of ending the ban in favor of first securing another exemption for the Mir of Talpur.<sup>302</sup> The original wartime ban on pilgrim and corpse traffic into Iraq finally ended a few months later in September 1919.

Whereas the Ottomans had previously overseen the administrative aspect of corpse traffic into Iraq, British officials needed a new system that affected elites and non-elites differently.

...to ensure that none but bona fide pilgrims should be thus admitted, a simple identification certificate has been prescribed for issue free of charge by District Magistrates, Sub Divisional Magistrates, and Political Officers, who should in every case satisfy themselves that the applicant is a bona fide pilgrim and of good character.<sup>303</sup>

One cannot help but wonder the criteria officials imagined could distinguish between those pilgrims who were "bona fide" and those who were not. The language here

---

<sup>301</sup> No 140 G, 1919-06-04, Pros August 1920, Nos 38-42, General-B, Foreign & Political, NAI.

<sup>302</sup> Internal Memo, May 1919, August 1920, Nos 38-42, General-B, Foreign & Political, NAI.

<sup>303</sup> Copy of Memorandum No 2270 G from the Joint Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign and Political Department, September 2, 1919, File 48 of 1919, Deputy Commissioner Files, DSA (underline in original).

suggests that the British imagined some Muslim pilgrims were fake or otherwise suspect. The linkage of true pilgrims also being “of good character” may have been a means to discriminate against so-called “fanatics,” a label we know from chapter two was more about opposition to imperial occupation than religious fervor.

As a known person, Nawab Raza Ali Khan initiated the process to bury his father by speaking directly with the Rampur Political Agent, who in turn had a direct line to officials in Delhi. By contrast, one Delhi embroiderer had to first apply to the Deputy Commissioner’s office, who in turn assigned Delhi police to investigate and confirm identity, intent, and character for the whole travel party.<sup>304</sup> Only then could he secure either a passport or pilgrim certificate to travel to Iraq, whether going on pilgrimage or transporting a corpse for burial. By 1930, the certificate gave way to a standardized “pilgrim pass” for the pious bound for Iraq, Persia, or both.<sup>305</sup> No one traveling with Hamid Ali’s corpse needed such a document.

The vagaries of seasonal weather were another matter entirely. Unlike the wartime prohibition or paperwork requirements, seasonal restrictions bowed to no one and Raza Ali could not transport his father’s body until the warm season passed. On multiple occasions in the late-nineteenth century, the Ottomans had affected public health policies limiting the importation of fresh corpses. Pilgrims could only carry bodies into Iraq for burial if the bodies had a certificate confirming they had first lain in the ground for a minimum of three years and were effectively reduced to bones.<sup>306</sup>

---

<sup>304</sup> Passport Form D for S Husan, February 23, 1921, File 48 of 1919, DC, DSA.

<sup>305</sup> Blank Pilgrim Pass for Pilgrimage to Iraq/Persian/Persian and Iraq, File 48 of 1919, DC, DSA.

<sup>306</sup> For a thorough analysis of the 19th century corpse traffic industry as an important element in developing norms around state borders and international public health initiatives, see Ateş, “Bones of

Sometime between the restoration of pilgrim traffic in September 1919 and late 1924, British Mandate Iraq instituted a policy that limited the condition of a corpse based on the time of year. The Iraq Holy Shrines (Corpse Traffic Law) of 1924 maintained the designations of “dried” and “moist” corpses. While there was no minimum period of time that needed to elapse for dried corpses, it did specify that dried corpses were ones already “in a state of complete desiccation” and for which “the process of putrefaction has completely ceased.” Any body for which “the process of putrefaction [was] still continuing” qualified as a “moist” corpse. In addition to requiring inspections and a certified “conveyance permit,” the law included a brief and innocuous sub-clause, limiting moist corpse importation to November 1 through March 31.<sup>307</sup> This policy ensured that rotting (and potentially infectious) bodies would not be entering the country during the warmest part of the year.

British India officials were not precisely diligent in their efforts to ensure compliance with the Iraqi law. Having received the text of the law itself, members of the Foreign and Political Department readily issued copies of Article 3 of the Corpse Traffic Law, which detailed the requirements specific to foreign corpses, when other government offices brought relevant queries to their attention.<sup>308</sup> Interestingly, while article 3 uses the language of “dried” versus “moist” corpses, the legislation

---

Contention.”

<sup>307</sup> G.S.T. Orde Brown, Report upon the Labour in the Tanganyika Territory for the year 1925, (H.M. Stationery Office, 1926), 165.

<sup>308</sup> Memorandum No. D 2662-N, JG Acheson to Resident at Hyderabad, June 23, 1928, File No 162-N of 1928, Foreign & Political Department, Near East, NAI

operationalized the terms in the context of the law in article 1, which was not usually circulated by Foreign and Political Department officials.

These same officials were also disinterested in enforcement. When the Resident of Hyderabad sought clearance for a Sayyid Mummud Ismail to bring three corpses to Iraq via Persia, GoI (Government of India) officials spent months of correspondence paper settling reimbursements for telegram costs, and yet never inquired as to the physical condition of the corpses.<sup>309</sup> While they did learn that the bodies were all less than three years old (and only eligible for transit through Persia with a medical certificate), they simply concluded internally that the bodies were “presumably dried ones.”<sup>310</sup> Since Hamid Ali had died in the latter half of June 1930, there was no avoiding his body was still fresh. Thus, his corpse clearly could not enter Iraq’s borders until late October or early November at the absolute earliest.<sup>311</sup>

In order to coordinate an international corpse transfer, Raza Ali enlisted the support of the colonial administrators, shipping agents, contractors, and Muslim religious leaders in Iraq. By mid August 1930 he alerted GoI officials of his plan to arrange for transit for his father’s corpse to Iraq. Before that happened, he first intended to make several material improvements to the mausoleum where Kazim Yazdi already rested. While arranging his father’s final journey, Raza Ali had sent

---

<sup>309</sup> Telegram 5871-P, Hyderabad Resident to Simla, August 2, 1928, File No 162-N of 1928, Foreign & Political Department, Near East, NAI; Telegram, Tehran to Simla, June 23, 1928, File No 162-N of 1928, Foreign & Political Department, Near East, NAI; Memorandum 4149-P/F-493-28, May 21, 1928, File No 162-N of 1928, Foreign & Political Department, Near East, NAI.

<sup>310</sup> Memo regarding Demi-Official No 2662-N, June 1928, File No 162-N of 1928, Foreign & Political Department, Near East, NAI.

<sup>311</sup> Serial 1 in File 329 of 1930 Pts. I & II, Political Department, IOR/R/2/771/360, BL.

workers to Najaf to install electric chandeliers, in addition “marble and wood work and some [other] minor alternations” to the mausoleum.<sup>312</sup>

As the ruler of a princely state, Hamid Ali Khan had a right to certain ceremonial honors in life. An Honorary Major-General in the British Army, he earned additional prestige for his support during World War I—in particular for services rendered by the Rampur Imperial Service Infantry in East Africa.<sup>313</sup> Of particular note, this recognition included the Crown promoting the Rampur Nawabs from a thirteen-gun salute to fifteen-gun salute—a metric of military prestige granted by the colonial state only to princely states of certain import. Raza Ali could make the majority of the arrangements to lay his father to rest in Iraq on his own. He could not, however, coordinate appropriate military honors for his father en route to Najaf. For this he needed to enlist GoI officials, who in turn needed to coordinate with officials in Iraq. Through his representatives, Raza Ali expressed that he would be immensely “grateful if both Military Authorities and also the Naval Authorities at the ports of embarkation and disembarkation [were] asked to pay Military honors to His late Highness [Hamid Ali Khan].”<sup>314</sup> He further hoped for an honor guard for his father’s remains and for the union jack to fly at half mast during the salute.

The duration of the construction gave Raza Ali sufficient time to make coordinate complex travel arrangements. Eligible steamer ships left Karachi for Basra

---

<sup>312</sup> Abdus Samad Khan to Stubbs, September 21, 1930, File 329 of 1930 Pts. I & II, Political Department, IOR/R/2/771/360, BL; Nawab of Rampur to Rampur State Political Agent, October 3, 1930, File 329 of 1930 Pts. I & II, Political Department, IOR/R/2/771/360, BL.

<sup>313</sup> R. V. Solomon and J. W. Bond, *Indian States: A Biographical, Historical, and Administrative Survey* (Asian Educational Services, 2006), 370.

<sup>314</sup> No 1015/ XVI-73(29.30), August 11, 1930, IOR/R/2/771/360, BL.

every Sunday at 10am.<sup>315</sup> That Hamid Ali's body did not leave for Iraq until mid-January 1931 suggests that the work on the mausoleum in Najaf took quite some time to complete. His father's body would first travel seventy-five hours via "special train" from Rampur through the Punjab to the Sindhi coastline.<sup>316</sup>

The subcontinent's landscape had first shaped the fates of urban centers and trade ports, and then in turn it dictated the limits of Britain's vast rail system. In this way the physical character of the region directed the last voyage Hamid Ali took in India. The route his corpse traversed could be only as direct as the infrastructure made possible. Having left Rampur just before 7pm on Tuesday January 13, 1931, Hamid Ali's remains reached Karachi late on Friday. On Saturday evening his remains finally boarded the ship. The SS Varela left Karachi on the morning of Sunday, January 18, 1931.<sup>317</sup>

Upon the departure of Hamid Ali's remains from Karachi, the British made an exception for the deceased aristocrat.<sup>318</sup> Technically, military regulations prohibited firing salutes on a Sunday.<sup>319</sup> Officials weighed various alternatives from firing minute guns for the salute instead of artillery to firing a belated artillery salute on Monday after the ship (and Hamid Ali's remains) were well underway.<sup>320</sup> At no point does various correspondence in the archive suggest that officials seriously considered not

---

<sup>315</sup> Telegram 18716, September 17, 1930, IOR/R/2/771/360, BL.

<sup>316</sup> No 1015/ XVI-73(29.30), August 11, 1930, IOR/R/2/771/360, BL.

<sup>317</sup> Abdus Samad Khan to Stubbs, November 18, IOR/R/2/771/360, BL; Telegram from Rampur Agent December 11, 1930, IOR/R/2/771/360, BL.

<sup>318</sup> Telegram No2894/Z, January 17, 1931, IOR/R/2/771/360, BL.

<sup>319</sup> No 474/XVI-73(29-30), January 9, 1931, IOR/R/2/771/360, BL. Telegram 66, January 14, 1931, File No. 289-N of 1930, Proceedings 1-64, Near East Branch, Political Department, NAI.

<sup>320</sup> Telegram 22C, January 10, 1931, File 329 of 1930 IOR/R/2/771/360, BL; Telegram 38C, January 15, 1931, IOR/R/2/771/360, BL.

firing a salute in Karachi at all. They had already admitted the inability to arrange for a salute in Basra, since there were “no guns” in the Iraq port city at the time.<sup>321</sup> This may have placed extra pressure on officials in India. The Rampur resident had helpfully reminded them that the “kindness will be much appreciated by his Highness in particular and the Musalman Community in General.”<sup>322</sup> Whatever the fifteen-gun salute meant when Hamid Ali was alive, it took on additional resonance as a performative public act of respect for the dead. Dramatic and auditory, firing an artillery salute on a Sunday was a small sacrifice to for even a small marginal gain in goodwill from Indian Muslims. At the same time, they were loathe to overdo it and give the impression of favoritism. In response to Raza Ali’s request for naval honors, officials balked. They had not done so for “the ashes of Their late highness’ of Gwalior and Jhalawar when they were brought into Bombay” a few years prior.<sup>323</sup>

Public officials, an honor guard, and members of the public stood waiting as the SS Varela anchored at Margil wharves on the morning of January 22, 1931.<sup>324</sup> In lieu of an artillery salute, bugles sounded. Soldiers in the Iraqi army served as pall bearers, carrying Hamid Ali’s body from ship to an awaiting van, which in turn took

---

<sup>321</sup> While the British were ostensibly in the process of drawing down in Iraq at the time, it feels surprising that they had already withdrawn all artillery from such a major port city. Nonetheless, the High Commissioner in Baghdad was explicit in his telegram. See Telegram No. 365, November 8, 1930, IOR/R/2/771/360, BL.

<sup>322</sup> No 1015/ XVI-73(29.30), August 11, 1930, File 329 of 1930 Pts. I & II, Political Department, IOR/R/2/771/360, BL.

<sup>323</sup> Internal memo, File No. 289-N of 1930, Proceedings 1-64, Near East Branch, Political Department, NAI.

<sup>324</sup> Prominent figures present included N. Fernandez (British Consul, Basra), Qaimmawam (representative of the *mutasarrif* or governor), Dr. J.S. David (“on behalf of the Indian Community”), and several city officials representing Basra police, customs control, railway police, and port health.

Hamid Ali's remains to the nearby Margil Railway Station.<sup>325</sup> By the train station a "shed" had been "prepared for the occasion." Within this utilitarian space, Iraqi officials recited the *fatihah* before departing and "the public kept pouring in" to pay their respects all day. In his report, the Protector of Indian Pilgrims left the "public" generic and unspecified, but separately noted visitation by South Asians living in the area, reporting that "some of the Indians who could not come to the wharves came up to the station to see us off" shortly before the coffin and its companions left for Baghdad.<sup>326</sup>

Baghdad was the first of three symbolic stops en route to Hamid Ali's final resting place. For the remainder of this section, we follow his body's progress as recounted in a write-up by the Protector of Indian Pilgrims. In doing so, we witness his remains visit each of the major four Shi'i shrine cities in Iraq—Kazimayn (now a neighborhood of northern Baghdad), Samarra, Karbala, and finally Najaf—and the physical infrastructure that enables this movement through space.<sup>327</sup>

The nawab's remains were met in Baghdad by officers of the Indian Association on the evening of January 23, 1931. The organization's secretary lay a wreath upon the coffin "on behalf of the Indian Community of Iraq."<sup>328</sup> They boarded

---

<sup>325</sup> "Interment of the late Nawab of Rampur," Monthly Report of the Protector of Indian Pilgrims in Iraq for January 1931, IOR/R/2/771/360, BL.

<sup>326</sup> The Protector of Indian Pilgrims worked under the secretariat of the British High Commissioner in Baghdad. In 1932 this position became the Indian Vice Consul at Baghdad.

<sup>327</sup> While this section includes brief mentions of the significance of each of these cities, doing so in greater detail is outside the scope of this chapter. On the Shi'i shrine cities broadly, see Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*; Daphna Ephrat, Ethel Sara Wolper, and Paulo G. Pinto, eds., *Saintly Spheres and Islamic Landscapes: Emplacements of Spiritual Power across Time and Place* (BRILL, 2020); Yitzhak Nakash, "The Visitation of the Shrines of the Imams and the Shi'i Mujtahids in the Early Twentieth Century," *Studia Islamica*, no. 81 (1995): 153–64.

<sup>328</sup> "Interment of the late Nawab of Rampur," Monthly Report of the Protector of Indian Pilgrims in Iraq

the train, escorting Hamid Ali's body to Baghdad's Al-Jawadin Station, where "almost all the Indians domiciled in [Kazimayn] and Baghdad" came to pay their respects. A "large procession" carried the coffin to a site the account only calls "the Shrine." Most likely this was a reference to the mosque in Kazimayn where two of the Twelver Shi'i imams lay buried. The nawab's coffin remained overnight, in the presence of the remains of the seventh imam, Musa al-Kazim, and his grandson, the ninth imam, Mohammad al-Jawad.

The next morning Hamid Ali Khan's body arrived at the city of Samarra by lorry, the Protector of Pilgrims by train, and the growing escort party by car. He explained that the Tigris River "had gone high," forcing the truck to bring the coffin to another Shi'i shrine via a ferry "with great difficulty." City officials escorted the procession "from the city wall to the Shrine." This surely referenced Marqad al-Imamayn, at which two more Twelver Imams lay buried (Ali Al Hadi and his son Hassan al-Askari, the tenth and eleventh imams, respectively) and the disappearance of the twelfth imam (Muhammad al-Mahdi) is marked. As at Kazemayn, Hamid Ali's body again spent the night in the presence of two imams. But Samarra is the only location about which the Protector of Indian Pilgrims indicates a certain level of disappointment. He notes in the report that "the reception here was not great," though he provides no hypothesis as to why that may have been the case. It could be that the height of the river indicated recent heavy rains, which could have wrought other inconveniences or even hazards on the local community.

---

for January 1931, IOR/R/2/771/360, BL.

Karbala was a different matter entirely. Here, I quote the Protector of Indian Pilgrims' report at length because it the most detailed glimpse into these events available:

At 9a.m. next morning (i.e. 25<sup>th</sup>) we left Samarra and reached Karbala at 4pm. A few miles from Karbala we saw a large number of cars. A crowd had gathered inside a certain garden. Our cars were stopped and we asked to enter the garden where we found [officials of the city].... I introduced Hafiz Ahmad Ali Khan to all the officials as well as the notables of Karbala. The Mutasarrif then took Hafiz Ahmad Ali Khan and myself in his car. The Kalidar's car was ahead; the second was the lorry containing the coffin and just behind it was the mutasarrif's car. All the other cars formed a long train which covered a very long distance. The procession then marched slowly. When the city of Karbala was reached the streets were found to be lined with people and under the Baladiyah Office a large number of Police was standing on both sides of the road in silence with reversed arms.

As the crowd was very great the Mutasarrif ordered the Police to surround the lorry and a few cars up to Bab Qilba from where the body was taken on shoulders of Khuddams to the Shrine of Imam Hussain. All the officials accompanied and remained in the courtyard till the body was to the Shrine of Hazrat Abbas and where the body remained for the whole night. I thanked the Mutasarrif and all others for the very great trouble they had taken specially during the fasting days.<sup>329</sup>

This passage is notable for several reasons. First, it describes a larger scale of participation than prior cities, substantial police presence, and the roles played by multiple forms of transit. This passage also represents the first and only time the Protector of Indian Pilgrims acknowledged that the month of Ramadan was ongoing during this burial procession. The month of fasting during the day had begun that year on January 20 and could well have played a role in the low attendance noted in Samarra.

---

<sup>329</sup> "Interment of the late Nawab of Rampur," Monthly Report of the Protector of Indian Pilgrims in Iraq for January 1931, IOR/R/2/771/360, BL.

The passage shows how visitation to the shrine marking the grave of Hussain, Ali's son and third of the twelve imams, follows the patterns established at Samarra and Kazemayn. At the same time, we seemingly have a departure from that same pattern. The report gives the impression of a relatively brief visit to the Shrine of Hussain's. This contrasts with the overnight visitations at the other graves of imams. Instead, Hamid Ali's body spent the night at the shrine marking the grave of Hussain's half-brother and standard bearer, Abbas. In doing so, it also marks the only city in which the escorts brought the nawab's coffin to multiple shrines.

There are clues in the report that perhaps the break with precedence was not so great. The passage opens with the Protector of Indian Pilgrims clarifying that the next morning was January 25, which is consistent with the dates provided earlier in the narrative. However, the next section describes leaving for Najaf "at noon on the 27<sup>th</sup>"—ultimately leaving January 26 wholly unaccounted for. Travel time cannot account for this discrepancy, as Najaf and Karbala are significantly closer together (approximately 50 kilometers) than Samarra and Karbala (more than 200 kilometers) with well established roads connecting the shrine cities. Given the immense significance of the Battle of Karbala in Shi'i traditions, this would be the city for which a longer stay was justified. This inconsistency could be a clerical error or it could be interpreted to mean that Hamid Ali's coffin remained in Karbala for two nights rather than one.

On the evening of January 27, 1931, Hamid Ali arrived at the Shrine of Ali in Najaf. Kazim Yazdi's grandson led prayers over the coffin in the courtyard. Finally, just after sunset, with "All Holy Places visited," Hamid Ali Khan was finally laid to

rest within the tomb complex at the tomb of his spiritual leader, Kasim Yazdi.<sup>330</sup>

Decades later, his wife and son would join him there after their own deaths.

### Migrants

If we understand Hamid Ali Khan's final rest journey as marking one extreme on a spectrum of the South Asian dead laid to rest abroad, then at the opposite extremis lies Hindu and Sikh migrant laborers dying overseas. When Hindu princes died abroad, they received similar accommodations as the Rampur nawabs, even being embalmed first so that the body would not start to decompose prior to cremation.<sup>331</sup>

The legality of cremation outside of India was seldom clear—even to upper-level officials. Generally, access to cremation in territories outside of their jurisdiction only came to GoI attention when something went wrong. More precisely, the issue usually garnered official consideration when someone somewhere was unable to cremate the dead. Among the cremation rights advocates, Indian Legislative Assembly member Gaya Prasad Singh championed the cause of Hindu cremation rights overseas on multiple occasions. By submitting formal questions to government, he triggered a process of British investigation and clarification—sometimes also accompanied by reluctant advocacy on behalf of Indians living and dying outside the approximate boundaries of British India. Colonial officials in Delhi and London frequently found themselves in the unlikely role of educator, as they tried to convey their unnuanced

---

<sup>330</sup> "Interment of the late Nawab of Rampur," *Monthly Report of the Protector of Indian Pilgrims in Iraq for January 1931*, IOR/R/2/771/360, BL. High Commissioner for Iraq (Baghdad) to Foreign (Delhi), telegram, January 30, 1931, File No. 289-N of 1930, Proceedings 1-64, Near East Branch, Political Department, NAI.

<sup>331</sup> "Claim of fees by Dr. R. Hilton Hutchinson," Foreign & Political, File 395 of 1929, NAI.

understanding of Hindu funereal practices to other Europeans, who were even less familiar with South Asian religions than they were.

On their surface, many colonial era debates over the right to perform cremations outside of India were premised on cremation as being tied to religious belief and identity. Hindus cremated their dead because their religious traditions dictated it. However, archival records indicate that doctrinal necessity was less central to discussions than conceptions of space and place. Physical locations of the dead and the living mattered, as did the locations of death and incineration. What's more, these locations mattered in ways that were at once absolute and relative.

The *Tanganyika Opinion* labeled the Administrateur Territorial of Belgian Congo's 1929 policy as tantamount to "religious dictatorship" given its ban on cremation:

Incineration of deceased is prohibited in the Belgian Congo. The followers of Hindu Religion are buried in a place reserved to the Asiatic population.<sup>332</sup>

Alongside a translation of the official's extremely brief letter, the *Tanganyika Opinion* provided a scathing critique of the cremation ban in the Belgian Congo. The article lambasted the Belgian state as "uncivilised," violating "the sanctity of postmortem rights," and undermining the "full liberty and freedom in matters of religious beliefs" of Hindus living and working in the Congo. While the anonymous author at no point accused Belgian officials as being motivated by anti-Hindu prejudice, they portrayed the policy as a slippery slope for religious freedom. The cremation ban violated the

---

<sup>332</sup> "Religious Dictatorship in Congo Belge" August 27, 1929, *Tanganyika Opinion*, Foreign & Political/External/1929, File 226-X, NAI.]

ability of Hindus to practice solemn rites, but it indicated that “Mohamedans, and on another occasion followers of another religion” could have their religious ceremonies restricted by the colonial state.

The polarizing letter by Belgian authorities relied on the unsaid presumption burial as the default and normal method for corpse disposal. Furthermore, it implied that burial was a perfectly acceptable substitute for cremation. The *Tanganyika Opinion* directly challenged these underlying claims, by comparing Hindu cremations to Christian burials: “According to the Hindu faith, the deceased must be cremated with certain specified rites and to put a ban against the observance of this ceremony is nothing short of profanity even as the banning of a Christian deceased person from being buried would be.” Perhaps, the critique’s author briefly hypothesized, the Belgian government had banned cremation as part of a “secret intention of proselytisation of the few Hindu families” resident in the Congo. Revoking the cremation ban immediately, the *Tanganyika Opinion* argued, would be an “act of statesman ship and civilised refinement.” In particular, the author advised Belgium to “confess its fault and restore to its inhabitants the liberty of conscience and religious beliefs” before the involvement of the British government, whose intervention had already been solicited. The article offered no specifics as to the appeal made to the British.

In New Delhi, Gaya Prasad Singh demanded that the government respond to Belgian Congo’s prohibition on cremation. Did the government know that such a ban

was “an outrage on the religious rites and ceremonies of the Hindus,” he asked.<sup>333</sup>

Furthermore, in light of the *Tanganyika Opinion*'s coverages, what actionable steps would the government take to ameliorate the injustice? Four years earlier, in 1925, Singh had similarly pressed the government to investigate cremation access in the West Indies. Whereas Indians in the Congo lived outside the boundaries of British imperial rule, British Guiana fell under the purview of London's Colonial Office. This time, too, he asked what the government of India had or had not done to arrange for the cremation of dead bodies in British Guiana.

Rather than a published pronouncement, Singh cited a specific instance, in which Dr. William Hewley Wharton had applied for and was denied permission to cremate his Hindu father in British Guiana. Although Wharton had converted to Christianity himself, he had tried to provide a funereal cremation for his father, who had come to Guiana as a indentured laborer decades earlier.<sup>334</sup> Wharton's inability to cremate his father appeared to contradict assurances offered the year prior by the British Guiana deputation that “wherever Hindus had any difficulty in the matter, the position would be satisfactorily adjusted.”<sup>335</sup> Educated in the United Kingdom as a practicing physician, and a prominent member of his community, Wharton was well equipped to lobby on his own behalf. Having traveled to the Indian National Congress Session in Amritsar at the close of 1919, Wharton likely had established connections

---

<sup>333</sup> Legislative Assembly Notice List 51-A, September 28, 1929, Foreign & Political/External/1929, File 226-X, NAI.

<sup>334</sup> Clement Toolsie Shiwcharan, “Indians in British Guiana, 1919-1929: A Study in Effort and Achievement” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Warwick, 1990), 268.

<sup>335</sup> Internal Memo, Education/Overseas/1925-July, Proceedings 10-19B, NAI.

with political leaders in British India. It is quite possible that Wharton applied for permission to cremate his father with the full expectation that he would be denied the opportunity.

Colonial administrators struggled to even ascertain whether the Hindu community there even *wanted* to cremate their dead in the British West Indies. By the time of Singh's Legislative Assembly question, Indians had been in various parts of the West Indies for at least eighty-years. Officials generally agreed that the first South Asians had settled in British Guiana in the late 1830s, and then in Trinidad and Jamaica in the 1840s.<sup>336</sup> By 1921, there were approximately 96,000 Hindus living in British Guiana alone.<sup>337</sup> Nonetheless, when Downing Street sought an update on what steps had been taken to remove barriers to Hindu cremation in British Guiana, Governor Graeme Thomson insisted there had been "no evidence of a general desire on the part of the Hindus for the disposal of their dead by burning." The governor went on to further reassure authorities in London that the immigration department had no record of any applications so much as "pointing to any such desire." Thomson's assertion is perplexing, as it came several months after Singh submitted his question for government response. As further evidence of Hindus in Guiana being fully content without cremations, he explained that Hindus were actively reserving land with the intended purpose of burying their dead as recently as July 1924:

... some forty or fifty East Indians, the majority of whom were Hindus, interviewed the Immigration Agent of the East Coast Demerara District regarding the purchase of Plantation Bee Hive on the East Coast for an East

---

<sup>336</sup> Internal Memo, November 1944, Commonwealth Relations, Overseas, File 7.80-88/44 O.S, NAI.

<sup>337</sup> Internal Memo by GS Bajpai, July 27, 1925, Education/Overseas/1925-September, Proceeding 27B, NAI.

Indian settlement. Among other reasons for the request it was represented that they wished land to be reserved as a burial ground. The Agent specially enquired whether it was proposed to use the ground for burying their dead or burning them. All present were unanimous in making it clear that they intended to bury their dead<sup>338</sup>

It was with this anecdote Thomson brought his letter and, presumably in his mind, the issue to a close. Having received Thomson's letter, officials in London wrote that "no obstacles exist in the way of resident Indians cremating their dead"<sup>339</sup> in British Guiana. On a purely technical level, they maintained, nothing was stopping anyone from cremation.

But the colonial state in Guiana had left Hindus in a legal bind. Thomson had earlier admitted that "while therefore the local law does not prohibit the cremation of human corpses, there is no *machinery* in existence for carrying out the practice."<sup>340</sup> A 1918 ordinance in the colony's capital city, Georgetown, codified the city council's right to establish a crematorium. This ordinance and others like it legalized cremation in an enclosed electric crematorium, but made no such provisions for open air funeral pyres. And in any case, as Thomson noted, no crematorium had been built by 1925.<sup>341</sup>

Unlike in the Belgian Congo, cremation in 1920s British Guiana was neither legal nor illegal. In this context, the above anecdote by Thomson rings incomplete. Is it any wonder that when questioned by an immigration agent, the Indians were

---

<sup>338</sup> Letter No 241, Graeme Thomson to Amery, May 27, 1925, Education/Overseas/1925-September, Proceeding 27B, NAI.

<sup>339</sup> Internal Memo, July 1925, Education/Overseas/1925-September, Proceeding 27B, NAI.

<sup>340</sup> Letter No 241, May 27, 1925, , Education/Overseas/1925-September, Proceeding 27B, NAI.

<sup>341</sup> The reluctance of officials in Guiana is all the more puzzling when compared to British authorities in colonial Honduras in 1913. After it came to their attention that a Sikh had been "buried before his religious tenets were brought to the notice of the authorities," colonial officials introduced a bill to regulate funeral cremation. The bill included a provision for the exhumation of the Sikh's body (and any future accidental burial in the future) and subsequent cremation. See Report on a Bill, March 12, 1913, CO 123/275/41, Kew.

adamant that they had no intention of using the space for cremations? It is absolutely possible that any Hindus involved in the land deal were content to bury their dead, even coming from communities in India that did so. But it is equally possible that they wouldn't have admitted to planning cremations if that were the case, out of concern for legal ramifications or jeopardizing their immigration status.

Government of India officials were derisive of their counterparts in British Guiana lack of knowledge of Hindu traditions. The recent deputation headed by Kunwar Maharaj Singh had previously reported that the "Immigration Dept of [British Guiana] did not realise the strength of Indian sentiment on the subject of cremation of their dead"<sup>342</sup> Despite the attempts at intervention, including the published findings of the deputation's report, London officials noted dryly that "evidently this ignorance still persists." With the officials in Guiana half a world away and lackluster success to remedy their understanding, India Office officials concluded that nothing more would be accomplished by further intervention. Any additional attempts to draw attention to the matter would similarly fail because colonial officials in British Guiana "would never admit that their Immigration Department are either ignorant or mistaken." And despite the Governor Thomson's conciliatory mention, ordinances legalized the establishment of crematoriums in Georgetown and New Amsterdam in the future, the officials were not mollified. The type of "modern crematorium" the ordinances permitted were no real solution because "according to the shastras cremation has to take place in open air." Officials in Guiana continued to insist for decades that they

---

<sup>342</sup> Internal Memo by GS Bajpai, July 27, 1925, Education/Overseas/1925-September, Proceeding 27B, NAI.

had no issue with cremation as a means of corpse disposal. Along with officials in British control Trinidad, the colonial administration in Guiana was "entirely agreeable to the cremation of the dead provided it is properly conducted in accordance with accepted modern methods and in a suitable crematorium."<sup>343</sup> In other words, they accepted cremation as practiced in Western Europe—not as practiced in South Asia.

Whereas, British West Indies officials did not ban Hindu cremation outright, the pronouncement published in the *Tanganyika Opinion* four years later left little in the way of the individual interpretation. Gaya Prasad Singh again called on the British state to intervene on behalf of Indian Hindus overseas, but this time the colony in question was beyond London's purview. British involvement in the administration of territory controlled by Belgium was a matter of international relations. Officials in India expressed how sincerely they trusted "that His Majesty's Government will be able to take very early steps to induce Belgian Government to remove this very serious interference with essential Hindu customs and religious rite of cremation"<sup>344</sup> Proper communication channels required appeals to the Foreign Office in London, who in turn might "be so good as to cause it to be explained to the Belgian Government that cremation is regarded by the Hindus as an essential feature of their religion and to use his best endeavors to induce them to cancel the prohibition."<sup>345</sup> Both of these solicitations placed Hindu religious identity and practice at the center of their

---

<sup>343</sup> Excerpt from Colonial Office to Commonwealth Office, April 17, 1944, Commonwealth Relations, Overseas, File 7.80-88/44 O.S, NAI.

<sup>344</sup> Telegram No 2792-S, Viceroy (Foreign and Political Department) to Secretary of State for India, September 17, 1929, Foreign & Political/External/1929, File 226-X, NAI.

<sup>345</sup> E&O 6886/29, EJ Turner to Foreign Office Undersecretary of State, October 1929, Foreign & Political/External/1929, File 226-X, NAI.

concerns. However, the Belgian government did not consider cremation's legality a religious issue. Unlike in British Guiana, where the machinery for so-called "modern cremation" could be established, Belgium allowed for no such possibility in either Congo or Belgium itself. And British bureaucrats felt little incentive to advocate on the behalf of their South Asian constituents in the region.

This chapter lays bare the contrasting experiences of how both India's elite and non-elite found eternal rest overseas. As a member of India's Muslim elite, Hamid Ali Khan's body traveled by vans and lorries, trains in India and Iraq, seaworthy vessels and river ferries, and aloft on the shoulders of other men. His son enlisted the aid of bureaucrats on multiple continents to coordinate a final journey that included the graves of six of the imams recognized by Twelver Shi'as. In dramatic relief, we have Hindu and Sikh migrant laborers abroad for whom access to funeral cremation was as out of reach as it was for convicted criminals in Fiji. Even though some of these migrants may have been more than content to bury their dead instead (as we will see in the next chapter), we cannot discount that there were always those for whom earthly burial was an anathema.

#### 4. COMMEMORATIVE CONSTITUENCIES

A sign outside of Paharganj Cemetery makes the burial space crisis clear: “THIS CEMETERY IS FULL TO ITS CAPACITY. ONLY FAMILY GRAVES (DOUBLING) ARE ALLOWED.”<sup>346</sup> Delhi is almost out of burial space. Families may “double” (reuse burial plots) after a period of five years, but no new spaces remain.<sup>347</sup> At the bottom of the sign, an additional note advises families to contact Burari Cemetery, twelve kilometers north, to arrange for “fresh burials.”

The dire warnings have come for years: the nation’s capital will be out of room to bury new bodies within a decade.<sup>348</sup> Headlines frequently oversimplify the crisis as a matter of scarcity. They describe Christians and Muslims as “running out of space” to bury their dead as if it were simply a matter of market demand surpassing supply.<sup>349</sup> It is true that, as in many Asian metropolises, Delhi’s exponential population growth strains all manner of urban resources. More people mean more deaths, which in turn means more bodies in need of disposal.

This explanation masks deeper systemic issues about how to dispose of the dead in ritually appropriate ways. Minority communities are disproportionately impacted by the lack of burial space. In postcolonial India, this particular pressure is

---

<sup>346</sup> Astha Saxena, “EXCLUSIVE: Delhi’s Dead Can’t R.I.P, Burial Grounds Shrink Due to Rapid Urbanisation and Encroachment,” *India Today*, April 28, 2016, <https://www.indiatoday.in/mail-today/story/delhis-dead-cant-rest-in-peace-320341-2016-04-28>.

<sup>347</sup> Sana Shakil, “Christian Cemeteries in Delhi Running out of Space,” *New Indian Express*, December 15, 2018, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/delhi/2018/dec/15/christian-cemeteries-in-delhi-running-out-of-space-1911753.html>.

<sup>348</sup> “Muslims to Run out of Burial Sites in Delhi in a Year: Report,” *Hindustan Times*, November 23, 2018, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/muslims-to-run-out-of-burial-sites-in-delhi-in-a-year-report/story-mgk0nS2TKdMicKtsDIYmNN.html>.

<sup>349</sup> On the commodification land in modern Delhi, see Anish Vanaik, “Representing Commodified Space: Maps, Leases, Auctions and ‘Narrations’ of Property in Delhi, c.1900–47,” *Historical Research* 88, no. 240 (2015): 314–32.

most keenly felt by the religious communities who bury their dead: chiefly Christians, Muslims, Zoroastrians, and certain low-caste Hindus. The committee that oversees half of the Christian cemeteries in the city now advises cremation instead of burial.<sup>350</sup> One callous to the rights of religious minorities might dismiss the urgency of a burial space shortage for Delhi's Christians (who comprise less than 1% of the population in the capital region) as applying to tiny fraction of the population. But the lack of Christian burial space is indicative of a wider problem. According to the Delhi Minority Commission (DMC), a third of the Muslim graveyards within the now vast city limits suffer from encroachment.<sup>351</sup> The DMC defines "encroachment" as any time private individuals, businesses, or government agencies appropriate cemetery spaces for purposes that have nothing to do with the dead. Delhi is not alone in this struggle. Religious minority communities, such as Muslims, Christians, and Baha'is) from Mumbai to Calcutta have faced similar circumstances for years.<sup>352</sup>

Governmental bodies are among the most egregious offenders. In Delhi alone, the Archaeological Survey of India has encroached on at least 11 Muslim cemeteries. Informants cited ASI encroachment as the reason why at least two graveyards in the city were no longer functional.<sup>353</sup> In another case, Delhi built a city school and a public park on the grounds of two cemeteries on Mathura Road and Ring Road

---

<sup>350</sup> Manoj Sharma, "Fighting for Space: Delhi's Grave Problem," *Hindustan Times*, March 2, 2014, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi/fighting-for-space-delhi-s-grave-problem/story-M3QnwbsMp9n1qOyYnSNJ6L.html>.

<sup>351</sup> Delhi Minorities Commission, "Problems and Status of Muslim Graveyards in Delhi" (Government of NCT Delhi, 2018), 19.

<sup>352</sup> Lhendup G Bhutia, "No Country for Dead Men," *Open The Magazine*, May 26, 2012, <https://openthemagazine.com/features/india/no-country-for-dead-men/>.

<sup>353</sup> Delhi Minorities Commission, "Problems and Status of Muslim Graveyards in Delhi," 20, 51.

respectively.<sup>354</sup> Other governmental offenders include the Delhi Development Authority, the Public Works Department, Delhi Jal Board, Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation, and at least one police station.<sup>355</sup>

Elsewhere, encroachment manifests as electric transformers, illegal apartment buildings, and car parks. A Parsi cemetery in Allahabad doubles as storage for bricks and sand for roadside sale.<sup>356</sup> In Ahmedabad, “300 households exist” in one Muslim cemetery, while the city’s police commissioner parks his car on another one.<sup>357</sup> In the same city, Hindu hotel owners built their restaurant over and around the graves of more than twenty Sufi poets and saints, among whom diners take their meals.<sup>358</sup> The cemetery spaces in Indian cities are often shrinking instead of growing with the population’s needs.

---

<sup>354</sup> Delhi Minorities Commission, 20.

<sup>355</sup> Delhi Minorities Commission, “Problems and Status of Muslim Graveyards in Delhi,” 54–55. *Jal* is the Sanskrit word for water. On the politics of Hindi Sankritization see Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (New Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); William Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); Christopher Rolland King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in the Nineteenth Century North India* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1994)

<sup>356</sup> Rustom Gandhi, “Graveyard Encroachers? | Reader’s Forum,” *Parsiana*, October 21, 2018.

<sup>357</sup> “Remove Encroachments from Ahmedabad Graveyards Immediately: Waqf Tribunal,” *Times of India*, October 19, 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/remove-encroachments-from-city-graveyards-immediately-waqf-tribunal/articleshow/87120770.cms>.”

<sup>358</sup> Rupam Jain Nair, “Over My Dead Body! Indians Enjoy Graveyard Eatery,” *Reuters*, June 19, 2007, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-graveyard-restaurant-idUSL197140020070619>.



Figure 4.11: Photograph of New Lucky Restaurant in Ahmedabad with graves painted green, surrounded by short white railings, and lying between booths.<sup>359</sup>

This chapter situates the present-day crisis within a longer history. It asks: to what extent did the interment of the South Asian dead physically constrain urban spaces and shape urban infrastructure projects in the colonial period? Maintaining a focus on Delhi, the chapter considers burial as corpse disposal praxis among different religious communities, and how it manifested as a land management issue. I demonstrate how the colonial state organized its urban planning and municipal administrations around the material realities of dead bodies. From funeral procession routes to cremation grounds to the configuration of individual graves, city officials tried to legislate the placement of corpses in urban spaces. Despite their efforts, the resilience of the urban dead of colonial India repeatedly forced the British to alter course. The dead drove the agenda. At the same time, the chapter reveals the current burial space shortage as a crisis that has been in the making for decades—long before the pressures wrought by the coronavirus intensified its urgency.

---

<sup>359</sup> “Kabristan Mai Cafe-‘Lucky Restaurant in Ahmedabad,’” Ashval, December 21, 2017, <https://ashaval.com/lucky-restaurant-ahmedabad-12189/>.

The chapter first explores two religious communities for whom identity and corpse disposal method are ostensibly tightly bound: cremation for Hindus and excarnation upon Towers of Silence for Zoroastrians. In both cases, well established use of earthly burial disrupts teleological categories of belonging as inextricable from the dead. In doing so, it reinterprets burial in South Asia as an issue that disproportionately impacts marginalized and minority communities. Among India's Hindus, the majority of burials have historically occurred among the poor, lower caste, tribal communities, and Dalits—and notably, many among these latter communities have resisted being labeled Hindus at all. Meanwhile, the Zoroastrian minority position in South Asia has often resorted to burying their dead for lack of access to a *dakhma* (Tower of Silence), and at times have even halted construction or even extant use of a *dakhma* due to opposition from their neighbors. As British India tasks municipal bodies to regulate disposal sites, I examine how local government understood the land needs of different disposal sites and their corresponding methods. This section is particularly interested in how the materiality of both the corpse and the disposal method manifested as a land and property issue from the 1910s to 1930s, a period during which anticolonial resistance and growing nationalist movements reached new heights.

Under British colonialism, Indian cities were Indian. By this I mean, from the beginning of the Company Raj period (1757) through to the end of the colonial occupation (1947), white Europeans were always a minuscule fraction of the population. Unlike the British colonies in North America or Australia, India was never a settler colony. In 1911, the combined European and Anglo-Indian population was

less than 200,000 and represented less than 0.001% of the population of India.<sup>360</sup>

Nepali immigrants, the largest immigrant community in the colony, outnumbered the European and Anglo-Indian population by more than 50,000.<sup>361</sup> Consequently, the administration of urban spaces in South Asia meant governing a predominantly non-white, Hindu-majority populace.

Categorization rendered everything, from people to property, more governable for the British.<sup>362</sup> To an extent, one could charge that the British merely inherited a Mughal administrative logic, a sort of Muslim-non-Muslim binary.<sup>363</sup> However, the Mughal emperors were themselves Muslims who came of age within a milieu of spiritual diversity and exchange. On the other hand, British conceptions of community boundaries were less fluid and deeply tied to administrative functionalities. The colonial state organized its colonial subjects according to religion, frequently reducing the region's diversity into two categories: Hindu and Muslim.<sup>364</sup>

### **Hindu Burial**

Today most Hindu cremations in India take place within twenty-four hours of death. If a person dies at home of natural causes, then the body remains in the home. A

---

<sup>360</sup> Gait, *India: Part 1. Report*, 1:141–46.

<sup>361</sup> Gait, 1:97.

<sup>362</sup> On categorization as a keystone to colonial administration in India, see Bernard S Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton University Press, 1996). On legibility as a larger scale project of modern state power, see James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), especially 54–83.

<sup>363</sup> On the judicial plurality in the Mughal empire and early British India, see chapters three and four in Lauren A. Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400–1900* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>364</sup> The literature on the Hindu-Muslim religious dichotomy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is extensive. Foundational texts include: Thursby, *Hindu-Muslim Relations in British India: A Study of Controversy, Conflict and Communal Movements in Northern India, 1923–1928* (1975; repr., Leiden: Brill, 2018); Thapar, “Imagined Religious Communities?”

family elder or Brahman priest leads the family through the last rites. First, family members cleanse the body. Washing the corpse is an intimate and gendered activity in that only men wash and prepare the body of a man for cremation, and women prepare the bodies of women. Afterwards, the readied body receives a series of physical items: clean clothes, tilak on their forehead, a white shroud, and flower garlands. As soon as the body is prepared, male family members carry the funeral bier to the *shamshan ghat* (cremation ground) while women in the family remain at home. The eldest son, closest male relative, or a priest leads the procession and the recitation of chants or hymns. As the procession makes its way to the cremation ground, men take turns carrying the bier, an act of labor that is also considered an expression of honor and piety. Once at the cremation ground, the chief mourner circumambulates the funeral pyre multiple times before setting it alight. Following cremation, the family collects the ashes and any fragments of charred bone that remain. According to most scholarly sources, Hindus have cremated their dead in this fashion (and with little variation) for thousands of years.<sup>365</sup>

Funeral cremation has become a hallmark of Hinduism as a world religion. It is the “normal means of corpse disposal” and “still performed today by practically all Hindus.”<sup>366</sup> To do otherwise is rare and always an exception. Or at least, that has been

---

<sup>365</sup> Klaus K. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 3rd ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 152–54; Anantanand Rambachan, “The Hindu Way of Death,” in *Handbook of Death & Dying*, ed. Clifton D. Bryant and Dennis L. Peck (SAGE Publications, 2003), 640–48; T.S. Rukmani, “Hindu Afterlife and Funerary Beliefs,” in *The Routledge Companion to Death and Dying*, ed. Christopher Moreman (London: Routledge, 2018), 110–18; Terje Oestigaard, “Cremations in Culture and Cosmology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Death and Burial* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 497–510.

<sup>366</sup> W. J. Johnson, “Burial,” in *A Dictionary of Hinduism* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 152; Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 152; Aditi Samarth, “The Survival of Hindu Cremation Myths and

the consistent messaging in over a century of scholarly and non-scholarly literature. For example, in his entry for the *Handbook of Death and Dying*, professor of religion Anantanand Rambachan omits any mention of burial in “The Hindu Way of Death.” When authors do acknowledge heterodoxy, the most commonly cited exceptions to the rule of cremation are holy men, saints, and very young children.<sup>367</sup> The persistent and widespread practice of tying corpse incineration to religious categorization may in part be a result of the long standing difficulty in defining Hinduism as a faith without a singular doctrinal text—no Torah, Guru Granth Sahib, Bible, or Quran. Neither is there a single individual who founded the faith—no Buddha, Muhammed, Tirthankara Aadinatha, or Jesus. The label “Hindu” emerged as a broad geographical category that encompassed many of the heterodox practices east of the Indus River. Despite this seemingly concrete origin as a natural boundary, delimiting what is and is not Hindu (as a conceptual category) has always been more nebulous.<sup>368</sup>

Certain caste groups particularly vexed twentieth-century census officials, who struggled with whether to categorize these communities as Hindu. In order to designate these “minor” caste groups as “genuine Hindus or not,” colonial officials introduced a series of litmus tests. The qualifying criteria included recognition of Brahmanical authority, vegetarianism, acceptance of the Vedas, worship of the “Great

---

Rituals in 21st Century Practice: Three Contemporary Case Studies” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Dallas, 2018).

<sup>367</sup> Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 153.

<sup>368</sup> For a brief and accessible overview of the terms “Hindus” and “Hinduism,” see Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (New York: Penguin, 2010), 24–35. For more in depth discussions, see: Arvind Sharma, “On Hindu, Hindustān, Hinduism and Hindutva,” *Numen* 49, no. 1 (2002): 1–36; Thapar, “Imagined Religious Communities?” More recently see Gavin Flood, ed., *The Oxford History of Hinduism: Hindu Practice*, The Oxford History of Hinduism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

Hindu Gods,” and incineration of the dead.<sup>369</sup> Administrative records presumed “disposal of the dead” as one of the defining characteristics of religious identity: Hindus practiced cremation, while Muslims “always” buried their dead.<sup>370</sup> Even though their constituents repeatedly undermined every part of this rubric, colonial officials reliably described cremation as the “normal” and “ordinary” means of corpse disposal among all Hindus.<sup>371</sup>

The equivalence of cremation and Hindu identity figures prominently in nineteenth-century debates over banning widow immolation upon the husband’s funeral pyre, known as *sati*.<sup>372</sup> Sati proponents ultimately were not arguing in favor of widow immolation; instead, they advocated for the preservation of a practice that they perceived as representative of a cultural heritage under siege.<sup>373</sup> The protection of *sati* doubled as a shield against the encroachment of imperial culture and values. As a result, Indian women in the nineteenth century were constructed as the “ideal patriotic figure [and] had to be particularly careful to insulate themselves against the pretensions of this [colonial] false knowledge.”<sup>374</sup> Colonial presence and opposition to

---

<sup>369</sup> Gait, *India: Part 1. Report*, 1:117.

<sup>370</sup> *Delhi District With Maps: 1912*, V Part A:95–96; *The Imperial Gazetteer Of India Central Provinces* (Calcutta: Superintendent Of Government Printing, 1908), 34–35.

<sup>371</sup> E. A. H. Blunt, *United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. Pt. II, Imperial Tables*, vol. XV, Census of India, 1911 (Allahabad: Superintendent, Government Press, 1912), 122, 289.

<sup>372</sup> From mentions in the South Asian epics like the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* to recollections by foreign observers like Marco Polo, the practice has roots stretching back hundreds and thousands of years. Prior romanticization by Europeans bolstered this interpretation; the act of ultimate sacrifice appeared to represent both the exceptional fidelity of an ancient culture and the epitome of Indian exoticism. For early references of *sati* in Hindu epics, see Doniger, *The Hindus*, 226, 300. On European romanticization see Figueira, “Die Flambierte Frau: Sati in European Culture.”

<sup>373</sup> Colonial discourse around *sati* mobilized women and their treatment as the metaphorical terrain upon which to advance arguments about modernity and tradition, and to define the limits of colonial control. See Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>374</sup> Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, 261. See also Tanika Sarkar, *Rebels, Wives, Saints: Designing*

*sati* may have resulted in not only an effort to preserve *sati* as a tradition, but also a surge in the practice among Bengalis as a form of protest.<sup>375</sup> In sum, equating *sati* with indigenous Hindu identity placed it at odds with colonial expansion and therefore primed widow-immolation as a form of anticolonial resistance.<sup>376</sup> And as one cannot have a *sati* without a funeral pyre, corpse incineration became similarly linked to Hindu identity.

Nonetheless, the linkage between disposal method and religious identity in the colonial imagination failed to correspond with the larger populations to which it supposedly applied. At one point approximately half of the population “classed as Hindus” in the Central Provinces and Berar reported that cremating the dead was not a religious obligation. A seventh of the province’s Hindus further frustrated categorization efforts by “always” burying their dead.<sup>377</sup> In the mind of colonial officials, cremation was a necessary characteristic of true Hinduism, but insufficient on its own. Of the Hindus in the North-West Frontier Province, one 1911 census official described Hindu religious practice in the region as “a pale reflection of the system which flourishes in the United Provinces and other areas to the East” despite the majority of Hindus in the region reliably cremating their dead.<sup>378</sup> Elsewhere there

---

*Selves and Nations in Colonial Times* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009); Partha Chatterjee, “The Nationalist Resolution to the Women’s Question,” in *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, ed. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2010).

<sup>375</sup> Ashis Nandy, “Sati: A Nineteenth-Century Tale of Women, Violence and Protest,” in *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernization in India*, ed. V. C Joshi (Delhi: Vikas, 1975), 175.

<sup>376</sup> See also Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow Sacrifice”; Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, “The Subject of Sati: Pain and Death in the Contemporary Discourse on Sati,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 3, no. 2 (1990): 1–27.

<sup>377</sup> Gait, *India: Part 1. Report*, 1:117..

<sup>378</sup> C. Latimer, *North-West Frontier Province*, vol. XIII, *Census of India, 1911* (Peshawar: O.C. Anand & Sons, 1912), 61.

were “so-called Hindus whose religion,” as understood by administrators, had “a strong Muhammadan flavour” that complicated the boundaries between categories of faith.<sup>379</sup>

Rather than relinquish any part of the litmus test, officials situated these communities along a spectrum of progress towards true Hinduism. Communities that practiced both dominant corpse disposal methods inhabited a “transitional stage between burial and cremation.”<sup>380</sup> For caste communities known to span multiple religious identities, officials confidently echoed their predecessors’ conclusions that within such communities “those who are Hindus cremate and those who are Muhammadans bury their dead.”<sup>381</sup> Differing religious identities remained the keystone to differing disposal methods.

In calling a community’s commemorative practices unsettled, officials implied that a diversity of disposal methods within a single constituency was unsustainable. That one community could practice not one or two, but three different corpse disposal methods disturbed any sense of a binary of praxis. Perplexed officials described the variability of corpse disposal methods of a subset of the Dom caste as having “burial customs” that were “very unsettled” given that among the Doms who lived in the plains “some cremate, some bury, some expose the body.”<sup>382</sup> One of the hallmarks of Zoroastrianism, excarnation (burial via exposure to the elements) fit nowhere in

---

<sup>379</sup> Gait, *India: Part 1. Report*, 1:118.

<sup>380</sup> A.C. Turner, *United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. Part 1: Report*, vol. XVIII, *Census Of India, 1931* (Allahabad: Superintendent, Printing and Stationery, 1933), 122.

<sup>381</sup> William Crooke, *Tribes And Castes Of The North-Western Provinces*, vol. III (1896; repr., Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1999), 338.

<sup>382</sup> Blunt, *Census of India 1911. Vol. 15, United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. Pt. 2, Imperial Tables.*, XV:123.

colonial conceptions of indigenous commemorative practices. Exposure and water burials broke down the burial-cremation binary even further. At least one official misunderstood excarnation as abandonment of the dead, describing one community's funerals as "unusual, amounting merely to leaving the corpse where it died."<sup>383</sup> For the customs to be settled, a singular practice would need to first subsume competing methods.

At what point is an exception no longer an exception? A census glossary of castes in Bombay Presidency included corpse disposal methods for 108 communities throughout the west Indian province.<sup>384</sup> According to these descriptions by community: 35 buried their dead, 25 buried and cremated their dead, 18 cremated their dead with some exceptions, 30 exclusively practiced cremation. The exceptions among those eighteen communities who mostly practiced cremation (except in certain circumstances), fall under four broad categories: age, financial, cause of death or disease, and marital status.<sup>385</sup> Death at a young age was the most common exception to cremation. At least eight communities, who predominantly practiced cremation, buried very young children who were under eighteen-months old, "infants," or those whose teeth had not come in yet.<sup>386</sup> A further four reported burying children who died before

---

<sup>383</sup> Blunt, XV:123.

<sup>384</sup> I use the term "communities" rather than "castes" in recognition of the variability of regional, familial, and occupational identities in relation to what functions as "caste" in colonial discourse.

<sup>385</sup> Census officials only considered four of these caste 108 communities (Matias, Sheikhs, Sanghars, and Sanjogis) as "Hindu-Muhammadans. See P.J. Mead and G. Laird MacGregor, *Bombay: Part I. Report*, vol. XV, Census of India, 1911 (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1912), 58–60, 66, 228–310.

<sup>386</sup> Mead and MacGregor, XV:254, 258, 259, 267 (under 18 months); 305 ("infants"); 268, 302, 304 ("children who have not cut their teeth").

the ages of two, four, five, or six.<sup>387</sup> Contagious illness only altered disposal practices in a handful of communities, who did not cremate infectious disease casualties or lepers (regardless of cause of death). Finally, four communities buried anyone who died still unmarried. Beyond Bombay, these exceptions manifested in dozens of permutations elsewhere in the colony.<sup>388</sup>

We gain more insight into the granularity of cremation exceptions in Punjab, which had a Hindu Brahman Superintendent of Census Operations. In a footnote on early childhood death, Pandit Harikishan Kaul introduced three commemorative stages of corpse disposal for the very young.<sup>389</sup> Initially, his explanation in noting infant burials corroborates what we see in Bombay around the same time. However, the description first diverged from Bombay in its extremely narrow time frame: only infants up to approximately “11 or 12 days” old. Nonetheless, the definition of this window specifies it applies to children who died “without suckling”—a distinction in child development that echoes a toddler’s teeth coming in as noted above in Bombay Presidency. According to Kaul, after suckling, a Hindu child who died before turning five, was “drowned.” In this context “drowned” refers to a third corpse disposal method, wherein the body is buried along riverbanks near or below the water line or placed in a moving body of water with weights to sink it.

---

<sup>387</sup> Mead and MacGregor, XV:293, 256, 288, 301.

<sup>388</sup> Blunt, *Census of India 1911*. Vol. 15, United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. Pt. 2, Imperial Tables., XV:123.

<sup>389</sup> Pandit Harikishan Kaul, *Punjab. Part 1: Report*, vol. XIV, *Census of India, 1911* (Lahore: Superintendent Government Printing, 1912), 108.

Kaul's four sentence footnote acknowledged more complexity in Hindu corpse disposal methods than many of his colleagues accomplished across many pages. He went on to briefly note the directives from a first millennium Vedic text (the *Yajnavalkya Smriti*) that children under two years be buried, while those older than two be cremated.<sup>390</sup> In at least some villages, records indicate that Hindu children were "buried without any objection in Muhammadan graveyards."<sup>391</sup>

Despite referencing the ancient text, he closed with the inclusion of a third permutation practiced by Hindus in the Punjab: water burials for children whose teeth have not yet come in, and cremation for the rest. In doing so, Kaul accepted a certain amount of diversion from Brahmanical textual authorities as acceptable within the parameters of Hinduism. At the same time, he maintained a commitment to funereal cremation as one of the "barest emblems of Hinduism."<sup>392</sup> In addition to children, Kaul noted that exceptions to cremation occurred among some religious ascetics and "*certain low castes who are allowed to be buried instead*" (emphasis added).<sup>393</sup> Assumptions of Brahmanical authority and who counts as Hindu are embedded in this latter category. In this, Kaul was not alone.

Colonial sources often acknowledged that cremation as a category for religious inclusion specifically disadvantaged already marginalized communities. Untouchable communities dominated the ranks of those who did not reliably cremate their dead.

---

<sup>390</sup>

<sup>391</sup> *Multan District, 1923-24, Part A*, vol. VII, Punjab District Gazetteers (Lahore: Superintendent Government Printing, 1926), 127, <http://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.105624>.

<sup>392</sup> Kaul, *Census of India 1911*. Vol. 15, United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. Pt. 2, Imperial Tables., XIV:109.

<sup>393</sup> Kaul, XIV:108.

Regarding the application of the Hindu litmus test, a census official in 1933 illustrated how the methodical application of these tests applied to three castes (Bhangis, Chamars, and Nats) in a single “typical” district of the United Provinces. Arriving at the question of corpse disposal methods among these communities in Budaun district, he wrote:

Test (8)—*Death ceremonies, whether burial or cremation*—Bhangis, Chamars, Brijbasi Gual Nats, Kalabaz Nats and Jogila Nats cremate their dead ; but when a person dies of cholera or snake-bite his corpse is floated downstream. Bagula Nats now bury their dead ; formerly they used to cremate them.<sup>394</sup>

In addition to ignoring that these communities self-identified as Hindu despite burying their dead, they likewise dismissed individual and community choices to categorize themselves as something else entirely. On multiple occasions, low-caste sweepers who buried their dead listed their religion as neither Hinduism nor Sikhism nor Islam, instead identifying their caste as their religion: “Mehta, Chuhra, Balmiki, and the like.”<sup>395</sup> Nonetheless, officials categorized them under the umbrella of Hinduism on the basis of either small numbers or the absence of a textual religious tradition (“they possess no religious literature”).<sup>396</sup>

By locating these marginalized communities under the umbrella of Hinduism without any alteration to the definition of what it means for “Hindus” to do with their dead, colonial discourse firmly declared these communities’ exceptions in their entirety.<sup>397</sup> There is strong evidence that cremation plays a significant and

---

<sup>394</sup> Turner, United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. Part 1: Report, XVIII:517.

<sup>395</sup> Latimer, North-West Frontier Province, XIII:61.

<sup>396</sup> Latimer, XIII:61.

<sup>397</sup> In Kancha Ilaiah’s landmark work *Why I am Not a Hindu*, he contrasts what death means as a lived experience among Dalit communities with upper caste Hindus. Strikingly, he connects the cremation of

understudied role in the Brahmanization of modern Hinduism. Thus, entire Dalit communities who neither claimed Hinduism as their religion nor cremated their dead became expansive exceptions in Hindu corpse disposal methods.

Both colonial and postcolonial texts indicate that marginalized communities are more likely to bury their dead than burn them for financial reasons. One census official noted that “forest tribes,” as well as “some of the poorer castes of Hindus” buried their dead specifically because cremation was more expensive.<sup>398</sup> In far more specific terms, Kaul called the Khalkhor Nats a “peculiar” case, describing how if an individual was “rich enough to afford the expenses of Hindu funeral rites” then his family would cremate him. At the same time, poor families would bury their loved one “like Muslims,” yet still “claim to be Hindus.”<sup>399</sup> In the present day, we see scholars either omit any mention of burial (as in the case of Rambachan’s entry) or take the financial conditions to a further extreme. For instance, in *A Survey of Hinduism*, Klostermaier lists four exceptions to cremation: disasters, small children, holy men, and “poor people for whom nobody is willing to pay the expenditure of cremation.”<sup>400</sup> Rather than earthly burial, however, Klostermaier goes on to describe how, in lieu of cremation, these bodies “are often unceremoniously thrown into the nearest river.” This language not only conflates financial wealth and marginal caste status within the

---

Dalits to the eradication of evidence by violent state actors: “Today the practice of burning dead bodies is used by state agencies like the police and the army to destroy the evidence of torture and murder. Brahminism must have evolved this practice in ancient India as the Hindus killed several Dalitbahujans who had revolted against them to destroy evidence of torture and murder.” Kancha Illaiah, *Why I Am Not a Hindu*, 2nd UK ed. edition (Calcutta: Samya, 2002), 97.

<sup>398</sup> The Imperial Gazetteer Of India Central Provinces, 35.

<sup>399</sup> Turner, United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. Part 1: Report, XVIII:517.

<sup>400</sup> Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 153.

Brahmanical system, but erases water burials as anything but a last resort for paupers. It reifies a teleological understanding of corpse cremation as a requisite of Hinduism and that which Hindus do.

One could argue that the enormous scale of the Hindu population naturally produces extensive diversity in corpse disposal praxis among Hindus. After all, they comprise around 1.3 billion people and collectively represent the third largest world religion. Perhaps Hinduism is an exceptionally tricky case given the debates over its definition, the historical circumstances of British colonialism, and the particularities of *sati* in colonial discourse. Therefore, as a means of contrast, in the next section I shift our focus to interrogate the question of disposal method as identity for a far smaller religious community, one that also has a lengthy a record with a distinctive corpse disposal method: the South Asian Zoroastrian community.

### **Zoroastrian Cemeteries**

While processing a request for burial ground space for Delhi's Parsi community, a British official in Delhi added the following parenthetical explanation to his missive: "(they bury their dead up here)."<sup>401</sup> He underlined the word "bury" twice for emphasis, anticipating questions from colleagues familiar with the so-called "sky burials" practiced by Parsis in Bombay.

Parsis, as the Zoroastrian diasporic community in India is called, were famous for their so-called "Towers of Silence" upon which they lay their dead.<sup>402</sup> Upon these

---

<sup>401</sup> No 126, April 13, 1869, in "Burial Ground-Native Christians, Mohammadans & Parsees," File 2 of 1860, DC, DSA.

<sup>402</sup> For Zoroastrian funeral practices, see Anton Zykov, "Zoroastrian Funeral Practices: Transition in Conduct," in *Threads of Continuity: Zoroastrian Life & Culture*, ed. Shernaz Cama (New Delhi: Parzor Foundation, 2016), 287–305; Mary. Boyce, *Zoroastrians, Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, Library

*dakhmas*, the Zoroastrian dead lay exposed to the elements, their bodies stripped of mortal flesh by vultures. Like Hindus, Zoroastrians consider the human corpse to be inherently polluting. Thus, their funerals employ a wide range of practices to limit physical contact with the corpse (from people to household items), as well as ritual purification processes to cleanse unavoidable or accidental contact.<sup>403</sup> Zoroastrians practice excarnation as a means to minimize the pollutive factor of the dead, as Parsi scholar Bomanjee Byramjee Patell explained at a June 1989 meeting of the Anthropological Society of Bombay:

According to the Zoroastrian religion, Earth, Fire, and Water are sacred and very useful to mankind, and in order to avoid their pollution by contact with putrefying flesh, the Zoroastrian religion strictly enjoins that the dead bodies should not be buried in the ground, or burnt, or thrown into seas.<sup>404</sup>

Excarnation and the use of *dakhmas* ensure the separation of the dead from the earth and society at large.

---

of Religious Beliefs and Practices (London ; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 109–129 and 325–330.

<sup>403</sup> Jivanji Jamshedji Modi, ““On the Funeral Ceremonies of the Parsees, Their Origin and Explanation,” *Journal of Anthropological Society of Bombay* II, no. 7 (September 1891): 405–40. Within the holy “book” of the Zoroastrians, the *Vidēvdād* chapters 5-12 detail the “deal with the impurity due to contact with a corpse and the purifications which are prescribed in this case” See J. J. Kellens, “AVESTA i. Survey of the History and Contents of the Book,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/avesta-holy-book>.

<sup>404</sup> Bomanjee Byramjee Patell, “Notes on the Towers of Silence in India,” *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay* II, no. 1 (June 1889): 58.

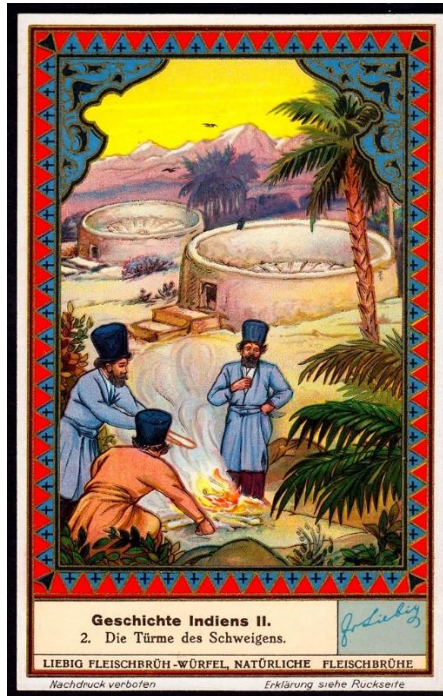


Figure 4.12: German advertisement trade card “*Die Türme des Schweigens*” explicitly ties Parsi identity to the use of dakhmas by locating the arrival of Zoroastrians as part of the series *Geschichte Indiens* (India’s History).<sup>405</sup>

By the late-nineteenth century, the west coastal port of Bombay was home to seven of the sixty-six *dakhmas* then in use in British India—more active *dakhmas* than any other city in the region.<sup>406</sup> Since even small *dakhmas* are monumental structures, mapping the establishment of these structures indicates “periods of financial prosperity for the Parsis and when and to where they migrated for business.”<sup>407</sup>

<sup>405</sup> “2. Die Türme des Schweigens”. Liebig trade card from the series *Geschichte Indiens II*. Anne McClintock’s *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (Routledge, 1995) is essential reading on the history of consumer goods, advertising, and race on a global scale. See also David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (Harvard University Press, 2011) for a focus on German companies like Liebig. Finally, Christopher Pinney, “Exotic India in Global Circulation: The Case of the Liebig Trade Cards,” *Marg*, March 2017 specifically addresses how Liebig’s Extract of Meat Company depicted India.

<sup>406</sup> The Gujarati city of Surat boasted eleven extant *dakmas*, of which only five were still in-use in 1890. Patell, “Notes on the Towers of Silence in India,” 59–64.

<sup>407</sup> John R. Hinnells, “Parsi Communities I. Early History,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2008, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/parsi-communities-i-early-history>. This assertion seems to come from Delphine Menant, *Les Parsis, Histoire Des Communautés Zoroastrinennes de l’Inde*, Annales Du Musée Guimet. Bibliothèque d’études (Paris: E. Leroux, 1898), 226n3. For more on the Parsi community in India, see also Jesse S. Palsetia, “Zoroastrianism in India,” in *The Religions of India: A*

Historian Jesse Palsetia argues that affluent Parsis constructed Zoroastrian sacred spaces (including *dakhmas*) to foster future community growth, rather than as a response to community needs.<sup>408</sup>

Histories of the community typically cite a 1672 letter by the Bombay governor to England, in which the governor wrote that while the local Parsi community was small at the time, officials anticipated “a greater number having gratified them in their desire to build a burying place for their dead in the Island.”<sup>409</sup> Even in the mid-seventeenth century, British officials surmised that the establishment of Bombay’s first *dakhma* incentivized the settlement of more Parsis in the city.

Earthly inhumation contradicted the unambiguous Zoroastrian belief that the human corpse is “the greatest source of pollution in the world.”<sup>410</sup> Nonetheless, Zoroastrians buried their dead in segregated cemeteries in other Indian cities (like Cochin and Lahore) and overseas (including in London, Zanzibar, Hong Kong, and Macao).<sup>411</sup> As with burial within the Hindu community, written sources acknowledge these aberrations only in brief, and with little further consideration. In her *Les Parsis, histoire des communautés Zoroastrinennes de l’Inde*, French ethnographer Delphine Menant footnotes her recitation of Patell’s list of Parsi burial locations.<sup>412</sup> She explains

---

*Microcosm of World Religions*, ed. Meenaz Kassam (New Delhi: Manohar, 2017), 225–46.

<sup>408</sup> Jesse S. Palsetia, *The Parsis of India: Preservation of Identity in Bombay City* (Brill, 2001).

<sup>409</sup> Gerald Aungier, December 16, 1673, quoted in Hinnells, “Parsi Communities I. Early History.”

<sup>410</sup> Mary Boyce, “Corpse,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2011, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/corpse-disposal-of-in-zoroastrianism>.

<sup>411</sup> Patell, “Notes on the Towers of Silence in India,” 56.

<sup>412</sup> It is difficult to know what to make of one of Menant’s footnotes, in which she seems to suggest that, in places without *dakhmas*, Zoroastrians cremated their dead before transporting the ashes (*cendres*) for disposal in accordance with their faith. Referring to eighteenth-century Dutch rear-admiral Johan Splinter Stavorinus, she writes: “*Stavorinus en parlant des Parsis qui s’éloignaient de leurs familles pour les besoins de leur commerce, mentionne que, dans certain cas, les parents de ceux qui*

that in 1863 the London-based Parsi community purchased 25,000 cubic yards in Surrey for a Parsi burial plot. Over a thirty year window, only Parsis were laid to the rest there.<sup>413</sup> By elaborating on the burial practices of Parsis in London, Menant provides some insight into the likely contemporaneous practice in Delhi at that time.

The knowledge that Delhi's Parsis were an exception compelled a nineteenth-century British official to clarify parenthetically that Parsis did in fact bury their dead "up here."<sup>414</sup> Both Menant's and Patell's handling of Parsi burials convey the belief that these small, far flung communities are the exceptions that prove the rule. Menant hypothesized that Parsis buried their dead in locations like Delhi because they lacked both a sizable population and sufficient means to complete such a project. However, other examples from the nineteenth century indicate that even small Parsi communities tried to construct *dakhmas*.

Two Indian Ocean port cities quashed Parsi efforts to expose their dead. In Colombo, Parsis initially succeeded in opening a *dakhma*. An 1847 deed created the Colombo Parsi Burial Ground Trust, who built the *dakhma* shortly thereafter.<sup>415</sup>

---

*mouraient au loin, ne négligeaient aucun soin pour transporter leurs cendres dans les Tours; certains dépensaient jusqu'à vingt mille roupies pour assurer aux défunts une sépulture suivant les préceptes de leur religion.*" Menant's use of *cendres* may be a mistranslation of Stavorinus' memoirs, originally published in Dutch (1793) before French and English translations followed in 1798. It could also indicate that Stavorinus conflated the funeral practices of multiple religious communities, since the international transport of Hindu ashes is well documented in the last century. Alternatively, Stavorinus' description be an important and unappreciated contribution to how we understand the history of corpse disposal as heritage in the non-Christian world. The peculiarity warrants more in depth searching for corroborating sources from among the records of the early to mid-modern Zoroastrian global diaspora. See Menant, *Les Parsis, Histoire Des Communautés Zoroastrinennes de l'Inde*, 227n1.

<sup>413</sup> Menant, 227n2.

<sup>414</sup> No 126, April 13, 1869, in "Burial Ground-Native Christians, Mohammadans & Parsees," File 2 of 1860, DC, DSA.

<sup>415</sup> Jamsheed K. Choksy, "Iranians and Indians on the Shores of Serendib (Sri Lanka)," ed. John R. Hinnells and Alan Williams (Routledge, 2007), 199.

Within a short time, neighbors complained that exposed dead bodies attracted aggressive birds who harassed the neighborhood by “attacking pets and scattering human flesh.”<sup>416</sup> The community began burying their dead on the property instead. By 1861 the cemetery reached capacity.

Later in Zanzibar Parsis began erecting a *dakhma*, close to the cemetery grounds they had been awarded two years prior by the sultan. The Parsi population in Zanzibar was comparable in size to Delhi.<sup>417</sup> Local landowners sued in court for an injunction. Two European doctors validated their fears that the excarnation of Parsi corpses on such “low-lying” ground posed a public health hazard via “gaseous exhalations from the putrefying corpses and the probability of infection carrying flies.”<sup>418</sup> While the court found that the damage to the plaintiffs’ health would be irreparable, it did not frame its decision in terms of the defendants’ right to dispose of their dead according to their religion. Ostensibly, the injunction only prohibited the erection of a *dakhma* in that particular location, since “the whole country round Zanzibar [was] open to the defendants.”<sup>419</sup> That Zanzibar’s Parsis never built a *dakhma* elsewhere suggests that there were pressures beyond the court’s injunction.<sup>420</sup>

---

<sup>416</sup> K.D. Choksy, “Notes,” 1884-1938, unpublished: 20-22, quoted in Choksy, 199.

<sup>417</sup> The Parsi population in Zanzibar rose from 26 in 1884 to 64 in 1920. John R. Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora: Religion and Migration* (OUP Oxford, 2005), 267, 269.

<sup>418</sup> Cracknall, W.B., “Civil Case No. 470 of 1886, L. Matthews, Binti Masood and Yussongji Haridas, on Behalf of the Bhatia Mahajan, V. Mancherji Pestonji, Shapoorji Pestonji, Hormusji Nowroji, Dhanjibhai Dadabhai and Dorabji Dinshaw,” in *Zanzibar Protectorate Law Reports*, ed. William Murison and S.S. Abrahams, vol. I (1887; repr., London: Waterlow and Sons, Ltd, 1919), 26.

<sup>419</sup> 27.

<sup>420</sup> Of the three plaintiffs in the court case, the first was Lloyd Matthews, a powerful naval officer and British representative in East Africa.

These case studies indicate that a small population size corresponded with insufficient political influence rather than insufficient need or capital. Parsi communities in Zanzibar and Colombo had attempted to lay their dead to rest using *dakhmas*, only to face resistance from neighbors, the state, or both. While I have not found evidence that Delhi has ever been home to a *dakhma*, it is probable that any earlier efforts faced similar barriers to Parsis in Colombo and Zanzibar. In Delhi the Parsi population was microscopic. According to the most recent census at the time of Patell's writing, only 27 of India's over 85,000 Parsis lived in Delhi in 1881.<sup>421</sup> Forty years later that number had more than doubled, rising to 72 Parsis settled within Delhi.<sup>422</sup> In any case, Delhi's Parsis had already been using the land to bury their dead for a decade when they formally purchased the plot south of Delhi Gate and close to the jail's gardens in 1869.<sup>423</sup>

Over the decades, reliable access to the Parsi cemetery became an issue. Located to the south of Delhi Gate near the jail gardens, the original land grant did not include an access road—presumably because the area was unenclosed. Although a community representative had secured a three-foot wide passage to the burial ground from the road in 1877, a little over a decade later the path failed to meet the community's needs. A Parsi community representative, Sorabji Merwanji, described a funeral earlier that year like this: “it was with the greatest difficulty and hardship that

---

<sup>421</sup> Statistical Tables Appended to the Gazetteer of the Delhi District, 1883-4 (Lahore: Arya Press, n.d.), vi; Report on the Census of British India Taken on the 17th February 1881, vol. I (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1883), 23.

<sup>422</sup> L. Middleton and S. M. Jacob, *Punjab and Delhi. Part 1: Report*, vol. XV, Census of India, 1921 (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1923), 190.

<sup>423</sup> No 126, April 13, 1869, in “Burial Ground-Native Christians, Mohammadans & Parsees,” File 2 of 1860, DC, DSA.

we had to carry the corpse on our shoulders, of a Parsee gentleman who died about 4 months ago.”<sup>424</sup> Expanding the path width to twelve feet, he noted, could allow a carriage to arrive directly at the gate to the cemetery. They needed a road, not a footpath.

His carriage proposal represented a second break with Zoroastrian praxis in places like Bombay. In the same year as Merwanji’s letter, Patell’s presentation on Bombay’s *dakhmas* specified that funeral biers were always carried from the home of the deceased. His description paints a vivid image of a procession:

However distant...whether rich or poor, high or low rank, he has always a walking funeral—his body is carried to the Towers of Silence on an iron bier by official corpse-bearers, and is followed in procession by the mourners, relatives, and friends dressed in white flowing full dress robes, walking behind in pairs, and each couple join hand in hand by holding a white handkerchief between them in token of sympathetic grief.<sup>425</sup>

In contrast, by 1889 the inability of the carriage to pull up right at the burial ground’s gate introduced an undue burden on Delhi’s Parsis. We may surmise from Merwanji’s letter that Parsis in Delhi were already using a cart or carriage to bring the body as close to the cemetery as possible. In addition to the path being too narrow, an open storm drain sliced through the path. The wooden boards the Parsis had lain across the drain were a tenuous solution, one for which there was “always the fear of such frail structures giving way while carrying a corpse over it.”<sup>426</sup> They wanted safe and reliable access to the cemetery. At its heart, Merwanji’s complaint was about the

---

<sup>424</sup> Sorabji Merwanji to R. Clark, August 26, 1889, File 2 of 1860, DC, DSA.

<sup>425</sup> Patell, “Notes on the Towers of Silence in India,” 58.

<sup>426</sup> Sorabji Merwanji to R. Clark, August 26, 1889, File 2 of 1860, DC, DSA.

absence of sufficient physical infrastructure for the Parsi community to dispose of their dead.



Figure 4.13: Side-view of path to Parsi burial ground with proposed culvert over drain.<sup>427</sup>

Due to its location, the cemetery’s infrastructure was always mitigated by its proximity to Delhi’s jail. When Delhi officials approved widening the passage and the construction of a culvert over the drain, the jail superintendent had to issue his approval. Archival sources suggest that in order to reach the improved access road, Parsi mourners first passed along a road controlled by the jail. For four decades this fact had no impact on Parsi funerals, until 1909 when the jail closed some of the fences to prevent wandering cows. By blocking bovine encroachment, this policy change also closed off the grounds from the Parsi community, including “ladies and children [who] have also to visit the place from time to time to do homage to their dearest dead.”<sup>428</sup>

Based on recollections from her uncle Rusi Sorobji, Parsi filmmaker and Delhi historian Shernaz Italia describes the cemetery’s environment in the 1930s as a juxtaposition of tranquility and colonial violence:

It was a barren wilderness with hyenas and wolves loitering in the distant monuments. The first Parsi cemetery was made here and the community congregated for prayer meetings just beyond the graves. Neem and peepul trees provided natural shade and the sound of rustling leaves accompanied the

<sup>427</sup> M Mehta, Cross Section on Line AB, February 14, 1990, File 2 of 1860, DC, DSA.

<sup>428</sup> Nowrosjee R. Kapadia to Deputy Commissioner, October 6, 1909, File 2 of 1860, DC, DSA.

prayers. Rusi Uncle remembers seeing prisoners in the adjacent Delhi jail chained to tub-shaped iron trolleys full of bricks and mortar—construction material for the new city.

Sorobji's memory evokes a sort of triptych. It brings the reader first to an open and uninhibited expanse in which nature and humans share space. From there, Sorobji describes a contemplative space for commemorating the dead in community, sheltered by leafy branches. And then comes the abrupt demarcation with urban expansion, itself encompassing multiple forms of colonial violence over human beings and the landscape. As colonial cities sprawled from their original centers, they enveloped burial and cremation grounds. And as urban boundaries expanded, so too did the need for municipal bodies to regulate corpse disposal sites,

### **Municipal Governance**

While death occurred in every corner of British India, the legal management of corpse disposal was handled on the local municipal level. Provincial legislation empowered individual municipal boards to regulate burial and burning grounds, setting fees for municipally provided grounds, and “prescribing and prohibiting routes for the removal of corpses to burial or burning-grounds.”<sup>429</sup> The instructions to local bodies were often quite minimal, allowing quite a bit of autonomy for city boards to set specific procedures for managing the disposal of the dead. When introducing regulations for burials and cremations, municipal boards often based their authority in broad public health clauses, such as Section 298 I(h) of the 1916 United Provinces Municipalities Act:

“Prohibiting or regulating, with a view to sanitation or the prevention of disease, any act which occasions, or which is likely to occasion, a public

---

<sup>429</sup> Sections 285 and 298I(c), UP Municipalities Act, 1916 (II of 1916), Government of India.

nuisance and for the prohibition or regulation of which no provision is made under this heading.”<sup>430</sup>

In short, so long as the board cited public health concerns, almost any act within city limits could be regulated.

Municipal board mandates on corpse disposal methods were predominantly physical in nature. They specified where corpses could be in relation to one another physically, within the earth, and in relation to local landmarks. Most burial sites barred the reuse of an occupied grave and required that they were at least two feet apart and six feet deep.<sup>431</sup> In Delhi, the minimum grave depth varied based on material. In a public notice in Urdu, the policy described earthen graves as ones *pukhta na bana'e jaoe* (not made from masonry).<sup>432</sup> For such graves, six feet was still the minimum depth. However, *pukka* graves with masonry required only a depth of four feet.<sup>433</sup>

Municipal boards retained the right to demand physical enclosure of both cemeteries and cremation grounds. They permitted multiple modalities of boundary making, but the most commonly listed options (“walls, fences or hedges”) indicate that creating a physical barrier was more important than simple visual demarcation of the land.<sup>434</sup> The erection of enclosures, instead of something less obstructive like

---

<sup>430</sup> Section 298I(h), UP Municipalities Act, 1916 (II of 1916), Government of India.

<sup>431</sup> For examples, see the respective municipal regulations for the municipalities of Ballia, Benares Ghazipur, Jaunpur, and Mirzapur: G. G. Sim, No. 2126/XXIII-108, May 3, 1918; A. W. Pim, No. 3661/XI-30H, September 25, 1916; G. G. Sim, No. 2678/XI-30H, August 29, 1917; A. W. Pim, No. 1490/XI-30H, April 2, 1917; A. W. Pim, No. 5133/XI-30H, December 19, 1916. File 108 of 1916, Municipal, UPRSA Varanasi.

<sup>432</sup> *Masauda Ishtahar*, February 25, 1913, File No. 175 of 1913, Education, CC, DSA.

<sup>433</sup> It is difficult to translate either *pukhta* or the more widely used *pukka* from Hindi-Urdu to English. The terms convey a sense of completion, from the ripeness of fruit to the realization of a high level of expertise. A *pukka* grave is not merely dug, but constructed with some manner of masonry. The mere presence of a headstone does not make a grave *pukka*.

<sup>434</sup> No. 3661/XI-30H.

boundary stones, limited encroachment on the burial or burning ground. However, it also allied with the needs of the state by containing corpse disposal and preventing its encroachment upon the surrounding area. It was a mechanism to control local land use and limit expansion without state permission.

The erection of enclosures around burial and burning grounds also regulated the flow of bodies, the living, and the dead. Funeral processions could approach unenclosed grounds in open country from any direction. Even moderately short fences and hedge rows forced corpse bearers and most mourners to designated breaks in the enclosure. Distinct visible and physical barriers were also closely tied to formalization of disposal grounds as state-recognized or not.

When municipal bodies designated boundaries around corpse disposal sites, they bureaucratized local land usage practices. The arrival of a dead body at burning or burial grounds triggered the start of an eight hour timer, by the end of which the body had to be either interred or (mostly) reduced to ashes. Most municipal boards placed vague limitations on the spaces where corpse disposal was permissible, usually to either a “recognized burning ghat” or “existing burial grounds.”<sup>435</sup> They prohibited internment “in any piece of land which is not a recognized cemetery” without special sanction.<sup>436</sup>

---

<sup>435</sup> Series no 2126, “Byelaws for regulating burial and burning grounds and for prohibiting routes for the removal of corpses to burial or burning grounds,” May 3, 1918, UPRSA Varanasi. No. 3661/XI-30H; Draft byelaws regulating the burial and burning of dead bodies in Ghazipur Municipality, attachment in letter from Ghazipur Municipal Board to Benares Division Commissioner, July 25, 1917, UPRSA Varanasi.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

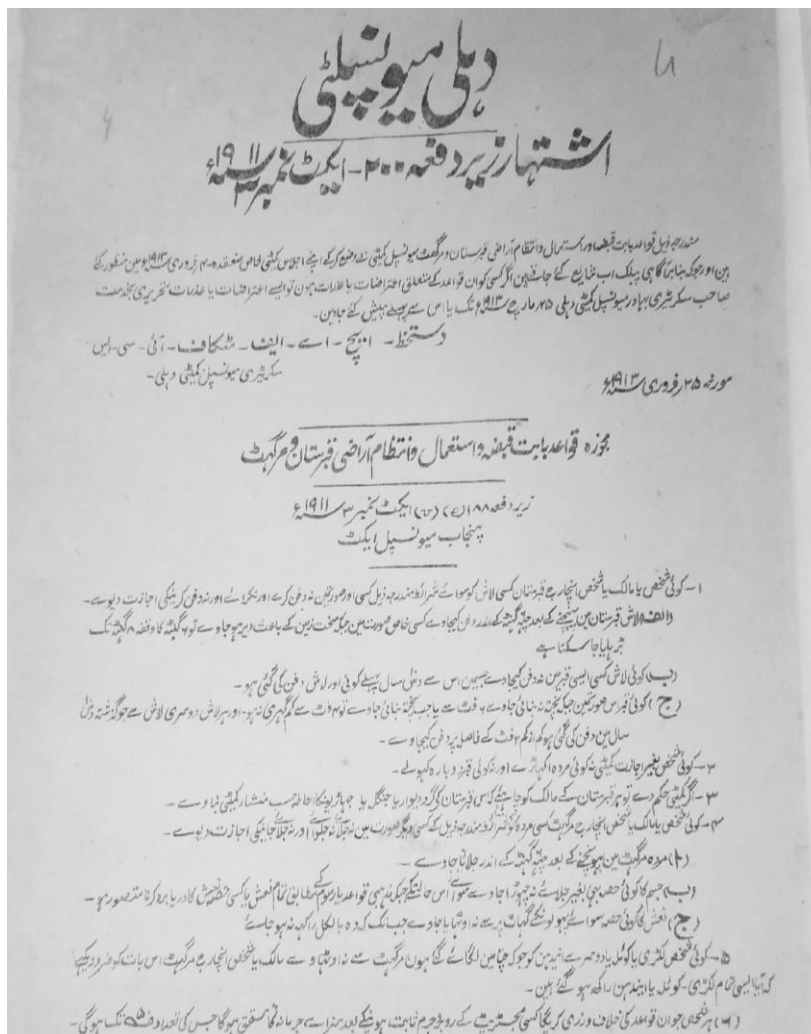


Figure 4.14: *Masauda Ishtahar* (translation: Draft Notification), February 25, 1913, File No. 175 of 1913, Education, CC, DSA.

Some municipalities were more explicit when it came to water burial locations. For instance, both Ghazipur and Ballia municipal bye-laws noted banks along the river Ganges where placing bodies in the river was either sanctioned or prohibited. In Ballia the limitation was minimal; corpse disposal at the Ganges (whether via cremation and or disposal in the water of the river itself) was permitted at any ghat except those “to the east of the old abadi.”<sup>437</sup> Meanwhile in Ghazipur, “between the Razaganj burning

<sup>437</sup> Series no 2126, “Byelaws for regulating burial and burning grounds and for prohibiting routes for

ghat on the east and Imilia ghat on the west” were off limits.<sup>438</sup> In contrast, the Jaunpur byelaws made no reference to corpse disposal in or along bodies of water even though the Gomti river ran through its center.<sup>439</sup> The Benares municipal board effectively suggested individuals use their own judgment for water burial locations, ensuring “such bodies shall be thrown into the deep channel of the river, sufficiently weighted to cause immediate sinking.”<sup>440</sup> The relationship between the dead and the Ganges was more than a matter of religious preference. As the banks of the river overflowed during monsoon or soil erosion shifted its course even slightly, it could wreak havoc on waterside spaces. As a result, both burial and cremation grounds in Ballia had to be closed, and new ones opened on safer ground.<sup>441</sup>

Neither the provincial legislation nor the municipal boards articulated a system for ascertaining recognition status for burial or burning grounds. Technically, municipalities in the United Province should have had a paper trail. The 1916 UPMA mandated that throughout the province “no burial or burning ground, whether public or private” could be “made or formed without permission in writing of the board.”<sup>442</sup> Nonetheless, UP municipal byelaws on burial and burning grounds remained silent on any procedures to either secure recognition for existing spaces or apply for permission

---

the removal of corpses to burial or burning grounds,” May 3, 1918, UPRSA Varanasi.

<sup>438</sup> Series no 2678 “Byelaws for regulating burial and burning grounds within the limits of Ghazipur Municipality,” August 17, 1917, UPRSA Varanasi.

<sup>439</sup> Series no 1490 “Byelaws for the regulation of burial and burning grounds in the Jaunpur Municipality,” April 2, 1917, UPRSA Varanasi. Series no 1490 “Byelaws for the regulation of burial and burning grounds in the Mirzapur Municipality,” December 19, 1917, UPRSA Varanasi.

<sup>440</sup> No. 3661/XI-30H.

<sup>441</sup> Series no 462, Ballia Municipal Board Chairman to Benares Division Commissioner, January 21, 1918, File 108, UPRSA Varanasi.

<sup>442</sup> Section 285(4), UP Municipalities Act, 1916 (II of 1916), Government of India.

to establish a new one. This administrative omission opened the door to potential legal disputes between the state and private parties.

Without identifying specific locations, many municipal byelaws also expressed the municipal board's ability to designate spaces as off limits for interring human remains. No such potential prohibitions appeared in the clauses regulating cremation sites. At this time the municipal board could imagine declaring certain sites off limits to burials, but not cremations. Most likely, this regulatory difference resulted from the physical constraints of the two methods of corpse disposal. While a burning ghat may only have enough room for a certain number of concurrent cremations, there is no limitation upon sequential use of a cremation site. By contrast, the requirement that "no body shall be buried in any grave in which another body has already been interred" necessitated a maximum capacity for any given cemetery.<sup>443</sup> A full cremation ground will have fresh space within a day. Not so for a burial ground.

Questions of property ownership challenged colonial efforts to legislate spaces for corpse disposal. The Ballia Municipal Board's bye-laws had this time, too, drawn the curiosity of the Benares Division Commissioner. This time he questioned the lack of reference to any "owner or person in charge of the [burial] ground," this too was a divergence from the ostensible standard set in the Benares bye-laws.<sup>444</sup> The board's chairman tried to explain to the incredulous commissioner that in Ballia "the burning ghats are not properties of any one, being the banks or the bed of the river Ganges."

---

<sup>443</sup> "Bye-laws for regulating burial and burning grounds within the limits of Benares Municipality."

<sup>444</sup> Series no 475, Ballia Municipal Board Chairman to Benares Division Commissioner, February 4, 1918, File 108, UPRSA Varanasi.

Normally, the state would hold the owner or caretaker of the grounds legally responsible for property corpse disposal in compliance with the municipal bye-laws.<sup>445</sup> Such legal arrangement was impossible in Ballia. As a result, the board drafted bye-laws which instead said that “the person in charge of the dead body has been held responsible” [emphasis in original].<sup>446</sup> The municipal board had attempted to replace one custodian with another. In this version, the person with control of the body would replace the person with control of the grounds as the legally responsible party. Nonetheless, the Commissioner struck out the clause in question. As in Benares, the Delhi Municipal Board maintained the right to demand the owner of the burning grounds enclose the space and to judge the wall, fence, or hedge row as satisfactory or not.<sup>447</sup>

Although municipal legislation found difficulty conceiving of the need to close a burning ground, provincial government preserved that right. If a health officer or civil surgeon certified a burning or burial ground as a current or potential health hazard to the surrounding neighborhood, the local government could issue a public notice of closure. At the same time, it was incumbent on the municipal board in question to provide an alternative space “if no suitable place for burial or burning exists within a reasonable distance.”<sup>448</sup> It makes sense that neither the act nor municipal bye-laws placed a precise value on what qualifies as a reasonable distance

---

<sup>445</sup> Series no 1490 “bye-laws for regulating burial and burning grounds in the Jaunpur municipality,” April 2, 1917, UPRSA Varanasi. [Also see Benares, Ghazipur]

<sup>446</sup> Memo No 1136, Assistant for Benares Division Commissioner to Chairman of Ballia Municipal Board, January 30, 1918, File 108, UPRSA Varanasi.

<sup>447</sup> Draft bye-laws for Controlling and Regulating the use and management of Burial and Burning Grounds,” 1913, File 175/1913, CC, DSA.

<sup>448</sup> Section 285(1), UP Municipalities Act, 1916 (II of 1916), Government of India.

or an unreasonable one. At the same time, it is easy to imagine colonial officials and local communities holding contrasting opinions as to how far one should travel to lay the dead to rest.

The materiality of the body mattered. At cremations neither could any body part “remain unconsumed,” nor could a “part of the body... be removed from the ghat until it is completely reduced to ashes.”<sup>449</sup> By contrast, Ballia’s municipal board 1918 bye-laws made an exception for removing “a very small part of the body” from the funeral pyre (before it had been reduced to ashes) when “required by religious custom to be thrown in the river.”<sup>450</sup> In Ghazipur, a similar exception appeared, exempting bones of the dead “when the custom observed by the deceased requires their preservation or removal.”<sup>451</sup> Previously this exception had been decidedly vaguer. Following the requirements that no part of the body be removed from the cremation ghats and that the body be wholly reduced to ashes, read the clause “unless there is any custom to the contrary.”<sup>452</sup>

In an earlier draft of Ballia’s byelaws, this departure from the norm set in Benares drew the attention of the Commissioner of the Benares Division, who inquired as to why the board permitted that any “part of the body [be] thrown into the river and not reduced to ashes *as is done in the Benares Municipality*” (emphasis

---

<sup>449</sup> “Bye-laws for regulating burial and burning grounds within the limits of Benares Municipality.”

<sup>450</sup> Series no 2126, “bye-laws for regulating burial and burning grounds and for prohibiting routes for the removal of corpses to burial or burning grounds,” March 3, 1918, UPRSA Varanasi.

<sup>451</sup> Series no 2678 “bye-laws for regulating burial and burning grounds within the limits of Ghazipur Municipality,” August 17, 1917, UPRSA Varanasi.

<sup>452</sup> Draft bye-laws regulating the burial and burning of dead bodies in Ghazipur Municipality, attachment in letter from Ghazipur Municipal Board to Benares Division Commissioner, July 25, 1917, UPRSA Varanasi.

added).<sup>453</sup> In response to his inquiry, “the Hindu members of the [Ballia Municipal] Board maintain that the custom mentioned has the sanction of the Hindu religion and also that even in Benares this custom is observed what-ever the rules there may be.” The board members offered a single concession: specifying that the body part must be “very small.” In addition the Ballia board pointed to local religious practice as justification, drawing attention to a greater deviation from the practices in Benares. The Commissioner himself had questioned why the requirement that every part of the body be reduced to ashes worked in Benares, but not in Ballia. In reality, Benares Hindus already ignored the local government’s mandate and persisted in disposing of the dead as they saw fit.

In 1916 the officials in Benares wholly reversed the language initially passed by Mirzapur’s municipal board. Following the standard requirement that bodies should be burnt within eight hours of arrival at a burning ground, the original language went on to say: “Any part of the body remaining unconsumed must be thrown at once into the Ganges.”<sup>454</sup> It specified neither size of permissible remains nor where or how it should be placed in the river. Unlike later inquiries, the Benares Commissioner did not appear to have requested further information or clarification. Instead, the under secretary wrote that since the relevant provision in question was inconsistent with the model bye-laws, it would be replaced by more standard language: “No part of the

---

<sup>453</sup> Copy of the Board’s resolution No 8, March 8, 1918, File 108, UPRSA Varanasi.

<sup>454</sup> Delhi and Delhi Cantonment were exceptions to the eight hour rule for cremations. Both municipal bodies mandated cremation be underway within six hours of arrival at the cremation grounds. G. F. de Montmorency, Notification No. 5273 Education. July 9, 1913, File No. 175/1913, Part B, Education, CC, DSA; E. R. Abbott, Notification No. 5990 Education, October 20, 1924, File 4(68) of 1924, Part B, Education, CC, DSA.

body shall remain unconsumed.”<sup>455</sup> Whereas line editing on comparable municipal byelaws in the Benares district received small changes in wording, in this case it ultimately reversed the original meaning entirely.

To the west of Benares and its neighboring municipalities, Delhi’s local government also possessed the authority to legislate the disposal of the dead. Idiosyncratic in its own right, it drew authority from a similar legislative charge and therefore much of the language mirrored the verbiage used in Benares.<sup>456</sup> In addition to concern regarding the materiality of the body, Delhi’s byelaws paid greater attention to the physicality of actual gravesites. In contrast to the eight-hour standard set by Benares, Delhi mandated that burial and cremation grounds dispose of a body within six hours of its arrival. Burial grounds received a two-hour grace period (for a total of eight hours) in instances where “rockiness of the ground” caused laborers to need more time excavating the burial spot.<sup>457</sup> As soil makeup in no way interfered with cremation, burning grounds received no additional time beyond six hours. Instead of prohibiting the burial in a grave that has ever had another body interred in it, the byelaws only proscribed use of a grave used in the last ten years. The two-foot minimum between graves similarly only applied to neighboring graves ten or less years old. The materials used to prepare the grave dedicated the minimum depth: four feet deep for masonry graves versus the standard six feet deep for all other graves.

---

<sup>455</sup> B. J. K. Hallows to Commissioner of the Benares Division, 21 December 1916, File 108, UPRSA Varanasi

<sup>456</sup> Jangi Lal Jain, Commentaries on the Punjab Municipal Act, 1911 (Punjab Act No. III of 1911) as Amended up-to-Date: With Exhaustive and up-to-Date Case Law Rules and Notifications (Chandigarh: Jain Law Agency, 1968).

<sup>457</sup> Draft bye-laws for Controlling and Regulating the use and management of Burial and Burning Grounds,” 1913, File 175/1913, CC, DSA

It was not always a given that sufficient land was available. By the twentieth century, municipal responsibilities for the regulation of burial and burning grounds expanded to include land acquisition. The process of repurposing land was simplest when the government already held ownership. In these cases, the zoning transition was reasonably uncomplicated. The bureaucratic transactions identified the property in question, along with its dimensions, rough location, and by whom it would be used:

1928 Lucknow: B 1.2.6.10; Mohalla-Aishbagh in Industrial Area; burial and burning grounds for the residents of Mawaiya and Garhi-Kanaura.<sup>458</sup>

In compliance with the Land Acquisition Act of 1894, officials always included a note that there were neither religious buildings nor tombs at the land in question. The community served by the new land usually received sanction by the colonial state to use the property at no cost, so long as it was used strictly for the specified purpose. However, things were not always as efficiently accomplished. The Muslim community in Pilibhit (in the United Provinces) was in urgent need of more space as the existing graveyard had reached capacity. The board identified that some nazul land by Dunde Khan Ka Bagh was the only option within a “reasonable distance.”<sup>459</sup> They agreed with an earlier recommendation by the Civil Surgeon that the location would work well since it had “three advantages of being situated quite out of the way, not far from the [existing] graveyard, and [requiring] no enclosure wall.”<sup>460</sup> Previously leased to a local blacksmith, by sanctioning use of the land free of

---

<sup>458</sup> Series no 3466, Lucknow Improvement Trust Chairman to Municipal Department Secretary UP, May 10, 1918, File 188/1928, UPSA.

<sup>459</sup> “Copy of letter No 147, Chairman Municipal Board Pilibhit to Commissioner Rohilkhand Division dated September 20, 1920,” File 100/1920, UPSA.

<sup>460</sup> “Extract from Civil Surgeon of Pilibhit’s remarks dated 9th July 1917”, File 100/1920, UPSA.

charge as a burial ground, the government would forfeit an annual income of Rs 7/-. To the government's disappointment, the Muslims of Pilibhit rejected the offered land on the grounds that the location was "small and uneven."<sup>461</sup> The municipal board countered by offering a larger space that had been leased for cultivation.

The municipality was likely trying to avoid pursuing this second option. In addition to being a substantially larger parcel of land (over 12 bighas instead of 7 bighas of land), it was agriculturally productive and therefore highly desirable in an arid region.<sup>462</sup> Unlike the original proposed spot, for which the blacksmith's lease had ended, this location required early termination of a lease and a costly compensation of Rs 192-8-5 paid to the farmer.<sup>463</sup> As a graveyard, the land ceased to be financially productive and the government would sacrifice future rent collection and instead lease the land free of cost for an indefinite period of time. Instead of supporting grain and vegetable cultivation, and produce for the local commercial market, the land instead produced meager income for the laborers who prepared the gravesites. By receiving the remains of the dead, it became a source of comfort for the grieving. It provided spiritual solace for the family members who came to perform ziarat by the graveside.

Most property acquisitions for burial and burning grounds were for plots adjacent to existing ones. In the early 1920s, the city of Allahabad twice appropriated land for these purposes. First in 1921, the municipal department acquired 1.2 acres to

---

<sup>461</sup> Rohilkhand Division Commissioner to UP Municipal Department, June 16, 1923, File 100/1920, UPSA.

<sup>462</sup> Rohilkhand Division Commissioner to UP Municipal Department, June 16, 1923, File 100/1920, UPSA; "Copy of letter No 147, Chairman Municipal Board Pilibhit to Commissioner Rohilkhand Division dated September 20, 1920," File 100/1920, UPSA.

<sup>463</sup> Rohilkhand Division Commissioner to UP Municipal Department, June 16, 1923, File 100/1920, UPSA.

extend a Muslim burial ground for approximately Rs 4600.<sup>464</sup> Then, a year later, paid only Rs 1000 to secure an additional 0.75 acres to extend a burning ground.<sup>465</sup>

Both the municipal laws regulating burial grounds (and the method of corpse disposal itself) required additional space far more often than burning grounds did. Old burial grounds were rapidly approaching capacity in municipalities across the United Provinces. The municipally provided land that had served communities in the eastern part of Saharanpur since 1874, but by 1917 it had filled. As the municipal board moved to formally close the grounds and proscribe any additional burials there, they needed to open new grounds.<sup>466</sup> Given the large amount of space sought to continue to support the same communities, rather than extending the existing space, the city chose to open an entirely new burial ground with over ten acres of available space.

A lengthy bureaucratic process ensued when the government employed the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 to take control of property for public purposes. The process begun by the Gorakhpur Municipal Board to expand Bhurpurwa Cemetery in 1919 dragged well in 1922. After two full years, the board was desperate. They wrote to the Gorakhpur Collector to explain their dire situation:

“practically we have got no land for burial of dead bodies on this side of the city and the clamour for more spaces is unbearable. Under the circumstances the Board is willing to take immediate delivery of the land at any cost.”<sup>467</sup>

---

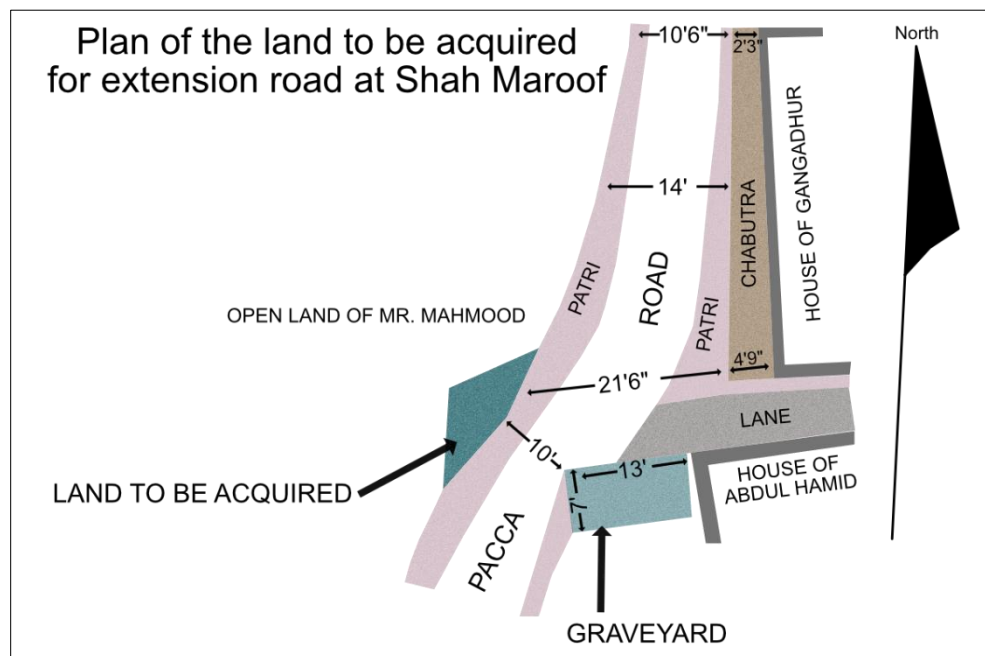
<sup>464</sup> Letter No 601 of 1921, Allahabad Collector to Commissioner Allahabad Division, February 9, 1921, File 34M, UPSA.

<sup>465</sup> Municipal map of burning gat at Nag Basu at Daraganj, 1921, File 34M, UPSA.

<sup>466</sup> Copy of letter No 92, Saharanpur Magistrate and Municipal Board Chairman to Commissioner Meerut Division, June 2, 1917, File 35M, UPSA.

<sup>467</sup> Copy of letter No 673, Gorakhpur Municipal Board Officer to Collector Gorakhpur, December 7, 1921, File 4m, UPSA. This acquisition was later cancelled in 1922, but the records don't shed light on what happened next and what land (if any) was acquired instead. See No 1376, Officiating Commissioner Gorakhpur Division to Municipal Department Secretary to United Provinces Government, June 24, 1922, File 4M, UPSA.

Pressured by the same shortage of burial plots, the chairman of the Saharanpur Municipal Board suggested that the government speed up the normal process. In August 1920, he cited the impending closure of the current graveyard as a matter of “severe urgency” and directed the government’s attention to section 17 of the Land Acquisition Act, which would allow them to almost immediately take control of the proposed new site.<sup>468</sup> The notification appeared in late October’s gazette.<sup>469</sup> Having received approval to employ section 17, Saharanpur officials waited only the mandated minimum (15 days) before taking immediate possession of just a little more than seven acres.<sup>470</sup>



Map 4.8 Land to be acquired at Shah Maroof in Gorakhpur for extension road. Based on sketch by Md. Azharul Haq Amin M.B. February 6, 1937, File 4M, UPSA.

<sup>468</sup> No 177, Saharanpur Magistrate & Municipal Board Chairman to Commissioner Meerut Division, August 25, 1920, File 35M, UPSA.

<sup>469</sup> No 1630/XI, Appropriate of Land for a Public Purpose, October 27, 1920, File 35M, UPSA.

<sup>470</sup> Draft letter to Commissioner Meerut Division, October 28, 1920, 35M, UPSA.

Existing burial and cremation grounds also constrained potential infrastructure projects. By establishing certain spaces as off limits, they forced communities to build around them. The living had no choice but to accommodate the dead. Sometimes the modifications necessary were relatively minor. In 1936 Gorakhpur, the corner of a small graveyard projected awkwardly into the street (see Map 4.8**Error! Reference source not found.**). The municipal board needed to widen a curve in the busy road in order to accommodate increased traffic. With the graveyard to the south-east, they could only expand to the opposite side.<sup>471</sup> Compared to land acquisitions to expand existing or establish new burial grounds, they needed only a small parcel: approximately eighty-three square feet (thirty-seven square feet from one plot; forty-six square feet from another).<sup>472</sup> In a similar instance a few years earlier, the inconvenient location of a different Gorakhpur graveyard had forced an awkward curve in the road. The graveyard was small, perhaps fifty feet across at its widest point and forty-five feet wide.<sup>473</sup> By 1931 city administrators could no longer deny the need to straighten the road; this burial ground, too, placed limits on how they were able to alter the landscape.<sup>474</sup>

---

<sup>471</sup> Md. Azharul Haq Amin M.B., “Plan of the Land to be Acquired for Extension Road at Shah Maroof”, 6 February 1937, File 4M, UPSA.

<sup>472</sup> No 2820/XI, Appropriation of Land for a Public Purpose, 27 August 1937, 4M, UPSA.

<sup>473</sup> Md. Azharul Haq Amin M.B., “Plan of the Land Required for Widening of Road at Nasirabad in Gorakhpur,” 16 April 1931, File 4M, UPSA.

<sup>474</sup> Gorakhpur Land Acquisition Officer, Inspection Report, 24 February 1932, File 4M, UPSA.

## Irwin Hospital

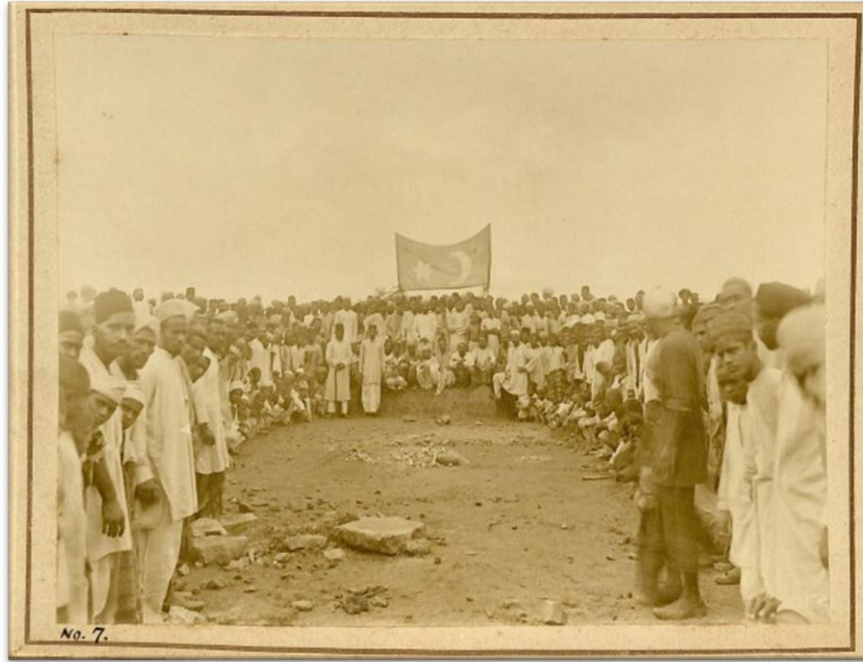


Figure 4.15: Photograph of Muslims protesting disrupted of graves in Delhi. Caption reads “Kachhe graveyard with heaps of half burnt bones of dead bodies of muslimat Irwin Hospital Site in Delhi.”

That photograph...presents a scene of the Muslim public peacefully standing in order with a most sorrowful mind on the loss of their graves... In front of the public there are two heaps of accumulated human bones taken out of their burials where the public is now sitting and standing.<sup>475</sup>

Mir Inayat Hussain’s captions painted a vivid and troubling picture. The discovery of multiple burials and three dilapidated mosques had brought construction on Delhi’s new hospital to a complete standstill. The long overdue hospital would serve both old and new Delhi. It would also lighten the load at the severely overburdened Civil Hospital, which even Indian Civil Servant A. B. Reid called “a disgrace to the capital!”<sup>476</sup> Throughout the city rumors spread of the willful

---

<sup>475</sup> Mir Inayat Hussain, September 26, 1930, Proceedings Health A, January 1932, nos, 1-10, Department of Education, Health, and Land [hereafter EHL], NAI.

<sup>476</sup> A.B. Reid, November 10, 1930, Health A, January 1932, 1-10, EHL, NAI.

desecration of Muslim graves and three old mosques. In a way, Delhi's dead required protection by Delhi's living at this juncture. At the same time, the city's dead were delaying the construction of a hospital sorely needed by the city's living.

In an effort to organize, the Muslim Anjuman Hai's Mushtarka Board held a "mammoth" public meeting at Jama Masjid in mid-September 1930. According to the board's joint secretary, M. Ziaddin Ahmed, as many as ten thousand Delhi Muslims attended.<sup>477</sup> He, in turn, relayed to the Chief Commissioner unanimous resolutions calling for the creation of a Muslim Enquiry Committee, which would investigate the "extent of damage to the monuments," report on the "alleged cremation of bones found on the site," and suggest to the government appropriate actions and reparations.<sup>478</sup> Several days later, Hussain sent officials a lengthy and detailed letter to accompany seven photographs from the proposed hospital site. Delhi Chief Commissioner John Thompson described Hussain as having "constituted himself for some time past a sort of un-official protector of Muhammadan monuments in Delhi."<sup>479</sup> A representative of the Jama Masjid Committee, Hussain was a familiar figure to government officers in Delhi.

Throughout the letter, Hussain used the public presence as a prop to enhance his true focus: the ruined mosques and graves. According to Hussain's captions, members of the public were present in most, if not all, of the photos. Though no photos accompany the letter as it was printed in the proceedings, Hussain's

---

<sup>477</sup> M. Ziauddin Ahmed, September 19, 1930, Health A, January 1932, 1-10, EHL, NAI.

<sup>478</sup> M. Ziauddin Ahmed, September 19, 1930, Health A, January 1932, 1-10, EHL, NAI.

<sup>479</sup> Letter No 508-C, John Thompson, October 15, 1930, Health A, January 1932, 1-10, EHL, NAI.

descriptions are able to stand on their own. First and foremost, the visual evidence of community members undoubtedly allowed Hussain to prove to officials that Delhi Muslims felt passionately enough about this matter to show up in protest. He described the “Delhi Muslim public standing peacefully, but much excited, looking at the breaking of the remaining huge stones.”<sup>480</sup> The direction of their gaze conveys the object of their attention, likewise directing the eyes of the viewer. They similarly stand “peacefully to defend” the threatened monuments, their role as guardians emphasizing the true importance of the monuments behind them. He never describes them in any detail. The only noted attributes of Delhi’s Muslim public are “peaceful” and “most sorrowful.”

Within these snapshots, the public became one with the landscape. Through identifying their relationship with the subject of his focus, Hussain treated them as physical markers. “[I]n front of the standing public” lay visible parts of the mosques and disinterred bones.<sup>481</sup> They stood “amidst” and “over” graves. The ruins lay “in front of,” “between,” and “in the center before” them. The public’s position differentiated between gravesites and sections of the ruined mosques, with those standing over one set of graves and those seated over a different set of graves. In another photo of ruined mosque number two, the imam’s seat lay “between the two groups of the public standing.” The repeated descriptions of the public’s physical relationship with the ruins and graves served a second function: it highlighted the enduring relationship between Delhi’s living and Delhi’s dead.

---

<sup>480</sup> Mir Inayat Hussain, September 26, 1930.

<sup>481</sup> Mir Inayat Hussain, September 26, 1930.

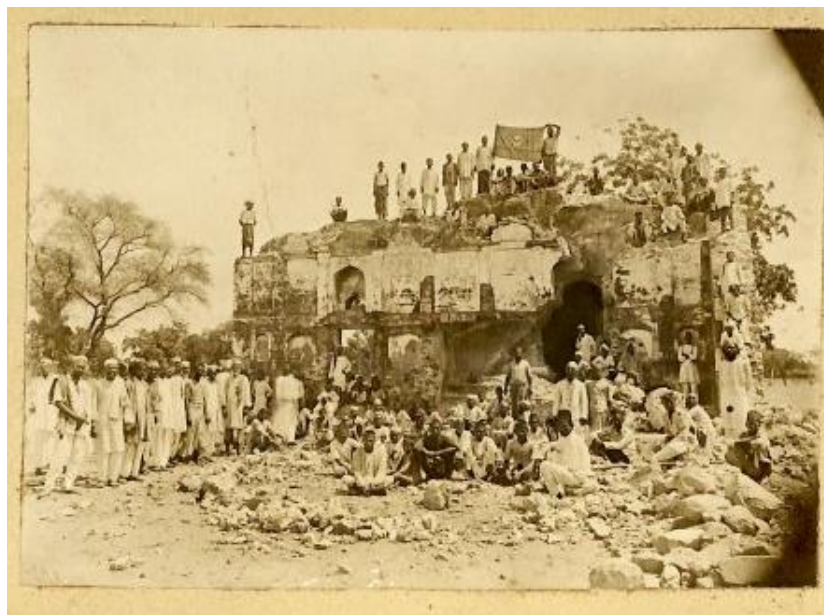


Figure 4.16: Photograph of Muslims posing on the ruins of a Delhi tomb. Caption reads “The Holy preserved tomb marked p9/150 partly dismantled at Irwin Hospital site in Delhi.”

From the onset, officials were suspicious of the agitation. Some reports claimed that Delhi’s Muslims were indeed united in their opposition to construction proceeding, with the city’s various Muslim societies having made this matter a “common cause.”<sup>482</sup> However multiple officials insisted that “the so-called Mushtarka Board hardly possesses the importance” it claimed and in no way represented all Delhi’s Muslims.<sup>483</sup> Interestingly, they go so far as to cite correspondence with Hussain as one who “urges Government to take steps to suppress the Board.” (Curiously, the proceedings did not replicate that communication with Hussain, nor did they provide further context.) They also attributed to Hussain that the Mushtarka Board merely “consists of a few shopkeepers and some Congress Muslims” with no significant position in the community.

---

<sup>482</sup> Fazl Husain, October 5, 1930, Health A, January 1932, 1-10, EHL, NAI.

<sup>483</sup> Letter No 508-C, Thompson.

Officiating Chief Commissioner, JNG Johnson, presumed a Congress conspiracy at work, which he described in a letter to the Home Department:

There seems little doubt that during the recent celebrations of so-called Independence Week in Delhi, with the object of winning support to the Civil Disobedience movement and keeping it alive, Congress conceived this method of stirring up anti-Government agitation. The flame was fanned by the two influential Maulvis. Kifayatullah and Ahmed Said, who have been the enemies of Government throughout; and they played upon the feelings of the more fanatical and lower-class Muhammadans.<sup>484</sup>

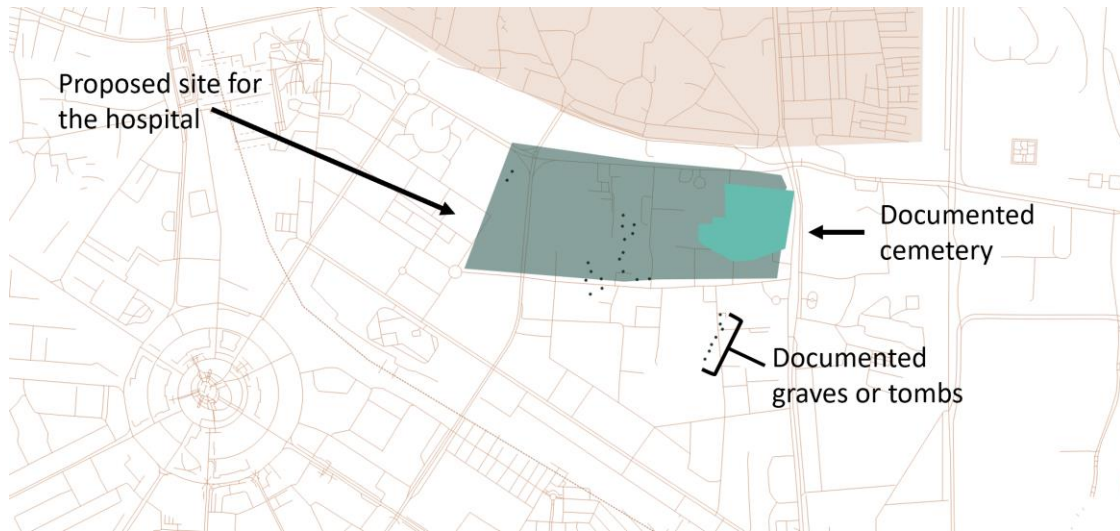
No doubt the possibility of a political angle seemed all the more likely when Hussain ended his own letter (accompanying photographs) on the topic of election reform. His closing remarks argued that a matter such as this could never be resolved until India's Muslims were empowered to elect their own representatives.

The Chief Commissioner tried to leverage the hospital's value as a public good. He argued that as "an institution from which all classes of the public would benefit... if there were to be any hitch about its construction, all classes would suffer."<sup>485</sup>

---

<sup>484</sup> Demi-official letter No. 139-CAMP|Edn, J.N.G. Johnson to H.W. Emerson, September 29, 1930.

<sup>485</sup> Minutes for Meeting held in Chief Commissioner's Office, November 4, 1930, Health A, January 1932, 1-10, EHL, NAI.



Map 4.9: Proposed footprint of Irwin Hospital and documented grave and cemetery sites.

At the start of this chapter, I introduced the idea of urban corpse disposal as a land management issue that uniquely impacts minority and marginalized South Asian communities. Of all the disposal methods discussed in this monograph, earthly burial is the least portable, the most permanent in terms of location. Therefore, in the first half of this chapter, we examined two religions whose identity is closely entwined with their funeral traditions: Hindus and cremation, Parsis and dakhmas. In both instances, there is a well established record of burial. Although Hindus were and are the religious majority in the region, it is among the marginalized that we most often see burial (both earthly and water) as an accepted disposal method. Some of these communities, like the Balmikis, have at various points rejected the label of Hindu entirely. Meanwhile, despite the Zoroastrian faith's ardent commitment to excarnation (or sky burial) on dakhmas, Parsis from Delhi to Zanzibar regularly buried their dead. Thus, the second half of the chapter examined how colonial municipalities largely dealt with burial grounds in terms of physical space and property management.

The latter sections of this chapter present a bilateral relationship between urban infrastructure and burial grounds in colonial South Asia cities. The persistence of the dead in their graves meant first and foremost that existing cemeteries could reach their physical capacity. Permitting eventual reuse after a period of time is an insufficient solution for exponential population growth. It therefore fell upon cities like Allahabad to repeatedly either facilitate the purchase of, or purchase themselves, new land for graves. Secondly, urban construction projects frequently came into conflict with pre-existing burial grounds. From roads in Gorakhpur to the hospitals in Delhi, municipal boards struggled to balance the needs of their growing cities with the requirements of the unmoving dead.

## 5. NECROGEOGRAPHIC ALTERNATIVES

### Assassination

Crowds streamed through the house on Burn Bastion Road, where they came to pay their final respects and do *darshan*.<sup>486</sup> Swami Shraddhanand had died the day before from a gunshot wound. Earlier in life known as Lala Munshi Ram, the prominent Hindu social reformer had dedicated himself to *shuddhi*, a movement to “re-convert” Indian Muslims to the Hinduism that their ancestors had supposedly abandoned.<sup>487</sup> His previous efforts in Agra to convert “a very low class of Mahomedans” (on the basis that they both were “descended from Hindus and [kept] many Hindu customs”) led to communal riots.<sup>488</sup> Abdul Rashid had forced his way into Shraddhanand’s house with an automatic pistol shortly before 4pm.<sup>489</sup> Print media and Delhi police later called the him a “fanatic” and “a returned Muhajir.”<sup>490</sup> In press releases and interviews, Congress leaders labeled Rashid a “madman,” “fanatic wretch,” “unhinged assassin,” and a “lunatic.”<sup>491</sup>

On the evening of December 23, 1926, Rashid killed the Swami and injured Dharam Singh, the Swami’s personal secretary. In the hours after Shraddhanand’s

---

<sup>486</sup> On *darshan* as a popular devotional act of viewing a revered victim of assassination, see Shahid Amin’s Shahid Amin, “Gandhi as Mahatma,” in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 288–348.

<sup>487</sup> For an excellent analysis of both *shuddhi* and the *sangathan* movements, see Charu Gupta, “Anxious Hindu Masculinities in Colonial North India: ‘Shuddhi’ and ‘Sangathan’ Movements,” *CrossCurrents* 61, no. 4 (2011): 441–54.

<sup>488</sup> “The Swami’s Career: Leader of Arya Samaj Movement.” *Times of India* [hereafter *TOI*], December 24, 1926.

<sup>489</sup> Rashid initially claimed he wanted to discuss religious matters with the Swami, but was turned away first by the servant and then by an apologetic Shraddhanand himself, who cited his poor health. Rashid stalled by requesting a glass of water and then fired on the Shraddhanand in the servant’s absence. Confidential: Demi-Official Letter No 5, January 6, 1927, Home/Political/1926-Dec/File 112, NAI;

“Panic in Delhi: Minor Disturbances.” *TOI*. December 24, 1926.

<sup>490</sup> “Shot By Fanatic?: Swami Shraddhanand Killed,” *TOI*, December 24, 1926.

<sup>491</sup> “A Brutal Murder. Leaders Interviewed.” *TOI*, December 25, 1926.

death, Delhi's shops closed, bracing themselves for potential violence. In the old city a fight left one Hindu in police custody and six Muslims injured—one of whom succumbed to his injuries within twenty-four hours.

Shraddhanand's body remained in his bedroom in the hours between his death and funeral procession. The next morning Professor Indra identified his father's body.<sup>492</sup> Colonel Franklin, Delhi's Civil Surgeon, performed the autopsy in that same room. He reported that Rashid struck Shraddhanand with four bullets: one to the chest and three to the right shoulder.<sup>493</sup> The chest wound proved fatal instantaneously. Shraddhanand's body remained in that same upper floor room where he had died until it was moved to the ground floor for public viewing.

Hundreds of people lined up outside Shraddhanand's home on Burn Bastion Road the morning after his death, waiting for the opportunity to do *darshan*. From there, the funeral procession (Map 5.10**Error! Reference source not found.**) began at a quarter past eleven in the morning. Shraddhanand lay upon the funereal bier with his uncovered face pointing towards the sky. The rest of his body rested beneath an embroidered shawl and flower blossoms. The body and its accompanying crowds wound their way through Khari Baoli, Chandni Chowk, and other "important parts of the city."<sup>494</sup> The procession wound its way through a canyon of humanity, with crowds

---

<sup>492</sup> "Wednesday's Hearing: First Prosecution Witness Examined," *TOI*, January 26, 1927

<sup>493</sup> An earlier media report had claimed that authorities had taken Shraddhanand's body to the mortuary, but it seems unlikely that they would then return the body to a private residence for the actual autopsy. "The Alleged Murderer's Confession: 'Responsible For Misery Of Mahomedans' Widespread Regret Caused At Death Of Swami Shraddhanand," *TOI*, December 25, 1926. "Panic in Delhi: Minor Disturbances." *TOI*. December 24, 1926.

<sup>494</sup> "Six Moslems Arrested For Stone-Throwing: Swami Shraddhanand's Funeral Procession Expressions Of Regret And Sorrow By Hindu And Mahomedan Leaders," *TOI*, December 27, 1926.

watching from street level, from balconies, and looking down from the city's rooftops. Newspapers claimed that upwards of 100,000 people swelled Delhi's streets. Hindus of "every class, including untouchables," stood silent, prayed for Shradhanand's soul, chanted hymn, and shouted slogans proclaiming that while Shradhanand could be killed the *shuddhi* movement could not be slain.<sup>495</sup> Finally, after almost four hours, the funeral procession reached the cremation ground at Nigambodh Ghat.



Map 5.10: Route of Swami Shradhanand's funeral. The procession began at his residence on Burn Bastion Road (A) and ended at the cremation grounds at Nigambodh Ghat (D). Along

---

<sup>495</sup> Demi Official Letter No 5-Confidential to H.G. Haig, January 6, 1927, Home/Political/1926-Dec/File 112, NAI; "The Alleged Murderer's Confession: 'Responsible For Misery Of Mahomedans' Widespread Regret Caused At Death Of Swami Shradhanand," *TOI*, December 25, 1926; "Six Moslems Arrested For Stone-Throwing: Swami Shradhanand's Funeral Procession Expressions Of Regret And Sorrow By Hindu And Mahomedan Leaders," *TOI*, December 27, 1926.

the way, the four-hour procession passed through Khari Baoli (B), Chandni Chowk (C), and other “important parts of the city.”

The press’s framing of the Swami’s murderer as a Muslim “fanatic” suggested this was a crime about tensions between Hindu and Muslim communities. Some observers placed significant pressure on members of Muslim communities to publicly proclaim their opposition to communalism—and to critique whether other groups had denounced the violence satisfactorily. According to the Marathi paper *Dnyan Prakash*, in the “sad atmosphere” following the Swami’s assassination, the failure of a January Muslim League session to articulate a “clear effort... to scotch the canker of communalism” and failure to promote religious unity disappointed Hindus.<sup>496</sup> In the view of the colonial state “responsible Muslim[s]... condemned the murder,” in turn implied an absence of condemnation as a marker of irresponsibility.<sup>497</sup> Meanwhile officials praised Hindus for “receiv[ing] the news with laudable restraint.”<sup>498</sup> In a similar vein, *Amrita Bazar Patrika* first criticized Muslims for failure to hold their own accountable; it then went on praise Hindus: “It speaks volumes for the toleration of the Hindus that the man who committed this dastardly outrage was not lynched in spite of all the protection that the police afforded him.”<sup>499</sup> As if in response to these calls to denounce the assassination as an act committed by an entire community rather

---

<sup>496</sup> No S.D. 57 Secret, January 20, 1927, Home/Political/1927-Jan/File 32/27, NAI.

<sup>497</sup> Confidential Fortnightly Report of the United Provinces for the 1st half January 1927, Home/Political/1927-Jan/File 32/27, NAI.

<sup>498</sup> Confidential Report on the Political Situation in the Punjab for the fortnight ending the 15th January 1927, Home/Political/1927-Jan/File 32/27, NAI.

<sup>499</sup> “The Alleged Murderer’s Confession: ‘Responsible For Misery Of Mahomedans’ Widespread Regret Caused At Death Of Swami Shraddhanand,” *TOI*, December 25, 1926.

than one individual, Muslim Congress leader Shaukat Ali lamented Shradhdhanand's sudden passing and "the mistake of a brother Moslem."<sup>500</sup>

Explicitly stated public positions ranged from demonstrations of multi-community solidarity to righteous anger. Public meetings became a platform to denounce extremist violence. When young members of the Arya Samaj in Quetta sought to have a black flag procession to protests the Swami's death, elder officers at the meeting overruled them, believing that such a demonstration would foster communal tension rather than mitigate it.<sup>501</sup> Motilal Nehru emphasized his personal knowledge of Muslim leaders who respected Shradhdhanand "in spite of their differences." Speaking to the press he stressed that he shared their fears that the act of a "fanatical wretch" could undermine Hindu-Muslim unity in pursuit of self rule.<sup>502</sup> On record at the INC session in Gauhati, he was more circumspect, focusing the courage and conviction of belief of his friend instead of commenting on the man who ended his friend's life.<sup>503</sup> Earlier that month Shradhdhanand had sent word that his poor health kept him from attending the annual gathering. Instead, his sudden death became the opening issue to which its attendees repeatedly returned.

After the INC session and just before the new year, Gandhi made Shradhdhanand's death the anchor in *Young India's* final issue of 1926. He contemplated Shradhdhanand's new role of martyr and its implications for mourning:

---

<sup>500</sup> "A Brutal Murder. Leaders Interviewed." *TOI*, December 25, 1926.

<sup>501</sup> No 6-Secret, Agent to Governor-General and Chief Commissioner in Baluchistan, January 3, 1926; Report on the Political Situation in the Punjab for the fortnight ending the 15th January 1927, Home/Political/1927-Jan/File 32/27, NAI.

<sup>502</sup> "A Brutal Murder. Leaders Interviewed." *TOI*, December 1925, 1926.

<sup>503</sup> Motilal Nehru and Shradhdhanand had been friends for decades, after having studied law together in college. *Report of the Indian National Congress Forty-first session Gauhati* (Assam) 1926, 49.

Death is at any time blessed, but is twice blessed for a warrior who died for his cause, i.e. truth. Death is no fiend, he is the truest of friends... Yet it is customary to mourn when a friend dies. The custom has no operation when the death is that of a martyr. I cannot, therefore, mourn over this death. He and his are to be envied. For though Shraddhanandji is dead, he is yet living... The family in which he was born, the nation to which he belonged, are to be congratulated upon so glorious a death as this. He lived a hero. He has died a hero.<sup>504</sup>

Lest anyone misinterpreted complexity of the issue, Gandhi went on to clarify that despite it all Shraddhanand's martyrdom was no victory, no cause for joy. Martyrdom came at a terrible cost: "an erring, misguided brother [had] been the cause of it." All of Gandhi's statements on Shraddhanand's death integrated deep compassion for "Brother Abdul Rashid" as a wayward victim of "insidious propaganda" stoking communal tensions.<sup>505</sup>

Dr. Narayan Savarkar made surprising reference of the earlier riots in Agra when commenting on Shraddhanand's death: "The Maulkana Mahomedans who died without being reconverted to Hinduism seemed to have beckoned the Swami to come to their aid in the next world."<sup>506</sup> Savarkar's comment not only relied on the presumption of *shuddhi*'s correctness. It also implied that failure to convert in life did not preclude reconversion after death. By his reckoning, Shraddhanand continued his work in the afterlife.

---

<sup>504</sup> M.K. Gandhi, "Shraddhanandji :The Martyr," *Young India*, December 30, 1926.

<sup>505</sup> M.K. Gandhi, "Shraddhanandji: The Martyr," *Young India*, December 30, 1926. Some members of the Hindu right continue to cite Gandhi's insistent reference to Rashid as "brother" as evidence of his betrayal of Hindus — the same logic Nathuram Vinayak Godse later cited as justification for assassinating Gandhi in January 1948.

<sup>506</sup> "The Alleged Murderer's Confession: 'Responsible For Misery Of Mahomedans' Widespread Regret Caused At Death Of Swami Shraddhanand," *TOI*, December 25, 1926.

Shraddhanand's death evoked memories of the 1897 murder of Lekh Ram among Hindutva leaning pandits.<sup>507</sup> More than fellow Arya Samajists, both Lekh Ram and Shraddhanand had been disciples of the movement's founder Dayananda Saraswati. Lekh Ram became a leader in the more militant Arya circles and courted controversy for provocative criticisms of other religions. Kenneth Jones sums up the provocateur as one who "symbolized a resurgent Hinduism;" to Muslims in particular he was "a fanatic, an implacable opponent determined to discredit and if possible destroy all that they held precious."<sup>508</sup> In some of his most controversial publications, he targeted the nascent Ahmadiyya sect, as well as the sect's founder and spiritual leader: Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. The two religious reformists published multiple tracts attacking one another and refuting the other's arguments. By 1893 Ahmad prophesied that Lekh Ram would die a violent death within six years as divine punishment. Four years later, Lekh Ram took into his home a young man who explained he had recently (re)converted to the Hinduism of his ancestors. The man lived in Lekh Ram's home for three weeks, before he fatally stabbed Lekh Ram on March 6 at the Lahore home of another Arya Samaj official.<sup>509</sup> A crowd of 20,000 came to the burning ghats to bear witness to Lekh Ram's cremation. Paradoxically, his death validated retrenchment on both sides. Hindu supporters declared Lekh Ram's death fostered a

---

<sup>507</sup> Ibid.

<sup>508</sup> Kenneth W. Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab* (University of California Press, 1976), 193.

<sup>509</sup> John Campbell Oman, *Cults, Customs and Superstitions of India* (T. F. Unwin, 1908), 171.

new sense of unity to protect a religious tradition under attack.<sup>510</sup> Among Ahmadiyyas, his death proved Ahmad's divine gift for prophecy.

The untimely death of Lekh Ram set a precedent that Shraddhanand's own passing would later echo. In Lahore itself and throughout the rest of India, public gatherings expressed sorrow and raised funds to support Arya Samaj charities in Lekh Ram's memory.<sup>511</sup> A few days later Shraddhanand himself had leveraged Lekh Ram's death in the name of Hindu solidarity at an Arya Samaj gathering in Lahore. As Lekh Ram's "direct successor... of militant Aryas in the Punjab," Shraddhanand established a new monthly publication, *Arya Musafir*, in Lekh Ram's memory.<sup>512</sup> The Arya Samaj had its "first martyr" to the cause. Some claimed that an Urdu pamphlet published out of Meerut intended to "warn the late Swami [Shraddhanand] that if he did not mend his ways, he would meet the fate of Pandit Lekhram (also murdered by a Muslim some 30 years ago)." It is unclear if this publication came to Shraddhanand's or police attention, before he became the second Arya Samaj martyr.<sup>513</sup>

Many staunch Samajists embraced the comparison, as well as the political expediency a martyrdom brings to any cause. Mahashe Krishna (representative of the assembly of the Arya Samajes of the Punjab and the Frontier Province, Jammu, Kashmir and Baluchistan) enthusiastically told the press that Shraddhanand's assassination "added to the glory of the Arya Samaj" because "the Swami, like his

---

<sup>510</sup> Jones, *Arya Dharm*, 194.

<sup>511</sup> [Arya Samachar (Meerut) March 1897;SVNP 1897 p240 p29][find a few more corroborating srcs]

<sup>512</sup> On Shraddhanand (who was known as Lala Munshi Ram at that time) as Lekh Ram's successor, see Thursby, *Hindu-Muslim Relations in British India*, 14–16. See also Jones, *Arya Dharm*.

<sup>513</sup> "Terrorism In Delhi: Urdu Poster Hindu Leaders' Lives Threatened," *TOI*, December 30, 1926.

friend and co-worker, Pandit Lekhram, ha[d] fallen a victim to intolerance and bigotry.” The power of martyrdom was perhaps best encapsulated in a *Times of India* subheading, proclaiming Shraddhanand as “MORE POWERFUL DEAD.” In the proceeding paragraphs, the Punjab Hindu Sabha president argued that Shraddhanand’s martyrdom was a “stimulus” which would help to “forward [the] movement among Hindus” and “would more than compensate for the loss” suffered by the country as a whole by Shraddhanand’s death.<sup>514</sup>

Other Hindus held the larger Muslim community responsible for Rashid’s actions and therefore advocated Hindus across India recommit to the cause of *shuddhi*.<sup>515</sup> Lala Hansraj, who like Shraddhanand had been an ardent follower of Swami Dayanand, issued a public message to Hindus almost immediately after news of Shraddhanand’s death reached Lahore: “Swami Shraddhanandji’s death should not excite Hindus but should make them all the more determined to carry on the noble mission of the Vedic church.”<sup>516</sup> Swami Satyadev equated Shraddhanand’s murder by Rashid with martial combat, asserting that Shraddhanand had “died as a soldier doing his duty at the post.” Further likening Shraddhanand’s death to an ongoing conflict, he promised that “thousands of Shraddhanand s will rise to take the place of the great Swami in the cause of *shuddhi*”—a Hindu hydra from which beheading begat exponential reinforcements.<sup>517</sup> For many Shraddhanand “died a martyr’s death,”

---

<sup>514</sup> “The Alleged Murderer’s Confession,” *TOI*, December 25, 1926.

<sup>515</sup> Secret: Fortnightly report on the Political Situation in the North-West Frontier Province for the second half of December 1926, Home/Political/1926-December/File 112-IV, NAI; Confidential: Report on the Political Situation in the Punjab for the fortnight ending the 15th January 1927, Home/Political/1927-Jan/File 32/27, NAI.

<sup>516</sup> “The Swami’s Career: Leader of Arya Samaj Movement.” *TOI*, December 24, 1926.

<sup>517</sup> “A Brutal Murder. Leaders Interviewed.” *TOI*, December 1925, 1926.

having both “lived for the cause of Hindus and died for the same.” Consequently, his death made it an imperative that Hindus continue his work.

Conspiracy theories abounded in the aftermath of the high profile assassinations of Lekh Ram and Shradhdhanand. Following Lekh Ram’s 1897 murder, rumors spread in Lahore of covert organization targeting Hindu leaders—especially those involved in the *shuddhi* movement.<sup>518</sup> Reports circulated claiming that Lekh Ram’s murderer planned to also kill, among others, the same Lala Hansraj who 30 years later would speak publicly about another Arya Samaj martyr. Within only a few days of Shradhdhanand’s death, Delhi Hindus announced a reward of Rs 10,000 for leads that might uncover “the alleged plot” behind Shradhdhanand’s murder.<sup>519</sup> Meanwhile, some Muslims alleged that Rashid was not the “true assassin.” They reasoned that he was a scapegoat, “arrested spitefully to put the blame of the murder” upon the city’s Muslim community.<sup>520</sup> In other words, they argued that not only had someone else pulled the trigger, but that Rashid was actually a victim of Hindu political machinations to promote communal hatred.

January 9th was Shradhdhanand Day. The Hindu Mahasabha proposed that all of India dedicate the day to Shradhdhanand “in conformity” with a Congress resolution passed at the Gauhati session.<sup>521</sup> The actual text of the INC resolution made a public declaration of “horror and indignation” at the murder of such a “brave and noble

---

<sup>518</sup> Jones, *Arya Dharm*, 196.

<sup>519</sup> Demi Official Letter No 5-Confidential, January 6, 1927, Home/Political/1926-Dec/File 112-IV, NAI; “Abdul Rashid’s Statement: ‘Zealous Musalman’ Boundless Hatred for Hindu Leaders” *TOI*, December 29, 1926.

<sup>520</sup> “‘Not the Real Assassin’: ‘Spiteful’ Arrest Mahomedan Version of Shradhdhanand Murder,” *TOI*, January 6, 1927.

<sup>521</sup> “Swami Shradhdhanand Day: Appeal to Hindus,” *TOI*, January 5, 1927.

patriot” as Swami Shraddhanand.<sup>522</sup> It said nothing, however, of a national day of mourning. The right-wing Hindu political party’s founder, Madan Mohan Malaviya, suggested that the day should begin with “all sections of Hindus” offering prayers for Shraddhanand’s soul at a river, water tank, or other body of water.<sup>523</sup> Malaviya suggested public meetings be held in the evening and subscription taken for a memorial fund. In Delhi, the main events included prayers at Shraddhanand’s cremation site, followed by one public meeting at Arya Samaj Temple in Chaori Bazar and then a second at the Queen’s Gardens. Delhi administrators reported that multiple speakers at Chaori Bazar “delivered eulogistic harangues. while a few indulged in offense references to the murderer and his religion.”<sup>524</sup> A poet at the Queen’s Garden’s meeting was more explicit, as he “recit[ed] objectionable verses, exhorting Hindus to spare no pains in uprooting Islam” in India in its entirety.<sup>525</sup>

Many evoked the conspiracy theories already in circulation and contemplated payback for the community they held responsible.<sup>526</sup> In the Central Indian city of Indore, Arya Samaj members considered a “boycott of Muslims” in the immediate aftermath.<sup>527</sup> Even without conspiratorial theories, Hindu leaders (especially those

---

<sup>522</sup> The full text of the INC resolution stated: “This Congress expresses its horror and indignation at the cowardly and treacherous murder of Swami Shraddhananda and places on record its sense of the irreparable loss the nation has sustained by the tragic death of the brave and noble patriot who dedicated his life and his great gifts to the service of the country, and his faith and espoused with fearless devotion the cause of the lowly, the fallen, and the weak.” *Report of the Indian National Congress Forty-first session Gauhati* (Assam) 1926, 132.

<sup>523</sup> “Swami Shradhanand Day: Appeal to Hindus,” *TOI*, January 5, 1927.

<sup>524</sup> Demi Official Letter No 10-Confidential, January 15, 1927, Home/Political/1927-Jan/File 32/27, NAI.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>526</sup> Secret: Fortnightly report on the Political Situation in the North-West Frontier Province for the second half of December 1926; Confidential: Report on the Political Situation in the Punjab for the fortnight ending the 15th January 1927, Home/Political/1927-Jan/File 32/27, NAI.

<sup>527</sup> No 1062-Confidential, Agent to Governor General in Central India, 31 December 1926,

affiliated with the Arya Samaj) advocated turning public mourning into fund raising efforts for the *shuddhi* movement.<sup>528</sup> As of January 9, 1927, Arya Samaj leaders already reported a combined total of Rs 42,000 donated or promised to the Shraddhanand Memorial.<sup>529</sup> Muslim leaders in turn accused Hindus of exploiting the murder to promote “anti-Muslim activity.”<sup>530</sup> Hartals (of varying success) persisted into January from UP to Bengal in Shraddhanand’s memory.<sup>531</sup>

Even repeated condemnation of Rashid’s actions by Muslim leaders did little to prevent further bitter feelings by their neighbors and “excited oratory” by Arya Samajists.<sup>532</sup> The president of the Central Mahomedan Association sought to deprecate the murder “with all the emphasis at my command.”<sup>533</sup> At the same time the Associated Press widely circulated a statement by Moulvi Mujibur Rahman, editor of *Mussalman*, who distanced his community from Rashid’s actions in language that left no room for doubt. Rahman concluded that “the assassination is an outrage on humanity.”<sup>534</sup> Rahman’s sentiment (that Rashid’s bullets caused bodily damage that

---

Home/Political/1926-Dec/File 112, NAI.

<sup>528</sup> Secret: Fortnightly Report on the internal situation in the North-West Frontier Province for the first half of January 1927, Home/Political/1927-Jan/File 32/27, NAI; No 2-Secret, Agent to the Governor-General, Punjab States, January 16, 1927, Home/Political/1927-Jan/File 32/27, NAI.

<sup>529</sup> Demi Official Letter No 10-Confidential: to H.G. Haig, 15 January 1927, Home/Political/1927-Jan/File 32/27, NAI.

<sup>530</sup> Confidential: Fortnightly Report for Bihar and Orissa for the first half of January 1927, Home/Political/1927-Jan/File 32/27, NAI; Demi Official Letter No 10-Confidential: to H.G. Haig, 15 January 1927, Home/Political/1927-Jan/File 32/27, NAI.

<sup>531</sup> Confidential: Fortnightly Report of the United Provinces for the 1st half January 1927, Home/Political/1927-Jan/File 32/27, NAI; Confidential: Report on the political situation in Bengal for the first half of January 1927, and Confidential: Fortnightly report for Bihar and Orissa for the first half of January 1927, Home/Political/1927-Jan/File 32/27, NAI.

<sup>532</sup> Confidential: Fortnightly report for Bihar and Orissa for the first half of January 1927, Home/Political/1927-Jan/File 32/27, NAI.

<sup>533</sup> “The Alleged Murderer’s Confession: ‘Responsible For Misery Of Mahomedans’ Widespread Regret Caused At Death Of Swami Shraddhanand.” *TOI*, December 25, 1926.

<sup>534</sup> “A Brutal Murder. Leaders Interviewed.” *TOI*, December 1925, 1926.

extended beyond the limits of Shraddhanand's physical body) was not necessarily sufficient for all audiences. The editors of *Bengalee* found "mere words" a poor substitute for the Muslim community better policing their own.<sup>535</sup> At the same time, Muslims resisted assigning Hindus political *carte blanche*; some criticized Hindu leaders for using Shraddhanand's murder to justify "anti-Muslim activity," such as *shuddhi*.<sup>536</sup>

January's progression did little to quell feelings of resentment and accusations gained further momentum Hindu publications in Lahore and Amritsar released cartoons and articles that "impugned" Muslim "expressions of sorrow." These intentional efforts to flame communal resentment were repeated at public meetings.<sup>537</sup> In Aligarh posters appeared that with "an appeal not to make the murder [of Shraddhanand] a Hindu-Muslim question."<sup>538</sup> Lahori Muslims held a mass demonstration to protest the growing anti-Muslim messaging.

### Prosecution

Over the course of January, a profile of Rashid came into focus. A resident of Faiz Bazar in Delhi, Rashid worked as a copywriter to support himself and his small family.<sup>539</sup> Little is known of his wife and children, though at least one, a daughter, had

---

<sup>535</sup> "A Brutal Murder. Leaders Interviewed." *TOI*, December 1925, 1926.

<sup>536</sup> Demi Official Letter 10-Confidential to Home Secretary Haig, January 15, 1927, Home/Political/1927-Jan/File 32/27, NAI.

<sup>537</sup> Confidential: Report on the Political Situation in the Punjab for the fortnight ending the 31st January, 1927, Home/Political/1927-Jan/File 32/27, NAI.

<sup>538</sup> Confidential: Report on the political situation for the United Provinces for the second half of January 1927, Home/Political/1927-Jan/File 32/27, NAI.

<sup>539</sup> Per Khan Bahadur Haq of CID: Life-long career; was in Lahore in 1913; worked at Hamdard in Delhi; when that closed in 1918 he went to Lucknow and worked for Hamdam for 6 months before returning to Delhi; "Abdul Rashid's Statement: 'Shy And Unwell.' Accused Denies Having Shot The Swami," *TOI*, January 27, 1927.

married and lived with her in-laws. He was in his forties when he joined thousands of other Indian Muslims who went on Hijrat to Afghanistan in 1920. During his time in Kabul he worked as a copywriter for the *Union of the East*. He also acquired an old Belgian pistol, with which he would later shoot Swami Shraddhanand. As with many of those migrants, he did not settle permanently in Afghanistan as planned. He returned to India in 1923. Three years later he suddenly divorced his wife against the wishes of his own family—based on an earlier investigation into Rashid’s involvement in the Bakr-Id riots of 1924, this may have been Rashid’s fourth time dissolving a marriage.<sup>540</sup> His former brother-in-law would later testify that during their marriage, fifteen years earlier Rashid “once severely beat his [first] wife without cause” and another time “beat his wife and when stopped began to weep.”<sup>541</sup> When reprimanded by his father for the divorce, Rashid confided that his plans to soon “do a brave deed” and become famous. Rashid reported lengthy conversations with Mufti Kifayatullah about the Arya Samaj’s *shuddhi* and *sangathan* movements in the months leading up to the murder—conversations Kifayatullah denied. In the 36 hours prior to the murder, Rashid had gone first the Tej office to inquire as to Shraddhanand’s address.<sup>542</sup> Then, upon reaching the address, he visited a paan vendor near Shraddhanand’s residence and asked where Shraddhanand lived.<sup>543</sup> Upon seeing his family for the first time after

---

<sup>540</sup> This same investigation concluded Rashid was “of an excitable nature.” Unfortunately, the records neither name the women in Rashid’s life, nor shed light on their lived realities. If Rashid had indeed married and divorced four times, his ex-wives experiences may have shed light on him as a man who was impulsive, impatient, and had internalized toxic masculinity. “Abdul Rashid For Sessions: Delhi Trial Magistrate Rejects Insanity Plea,” *TOI*, January 15, 1927.

<sup>541</sup> J.J. Skemp, AIR 1927 Lahore 567: Rashid v Emperor.

<sup>542</sup> “Abdul Rashid’s Statement: ‘Zealous Musalman’” *TOI*, December 29, 1926.

<sup>543</sup> “More Witnesses Examined: Abdul Rashid’s Trial,” *TOI*, January 26, 1927.

Shraddhanand's murder, he attempted to comfort them with assurances that "he had tried to save Islam from destruction and his kith and kin should be proud of him."<sup>544</sup>

Within the scope of the investigation, Rashid's motivations seemed to fit well into an established narrative of communal agitations between Hindus and Muslims. On December 29th, *Times of India* reported that in his statement to police, Rashid described himself as a "zealous Mussalman" whose "heart burned for Islam" in the face of *shuddhi* and *sangathan* movements "gaining ground every day." They summarized the five-typed pages:

His hatred for Hindu leaders such as the deceased Swami Shraddhanand knew no bounds and he had made up his mind to destroy all of them. He felt sorry that his task was only half finished, as some other Hindu leaders were still at large and were doing untold injury to Islam.<sup>545</sup>

Nonetheless there must have been some push back on the Bombay based paper. The very next day the *TOI* released a justification for the prior day's coverage. They explained first the provenance of the information regarding Rashid's statement: a telegram the Associated Press office in Delhi. They similarly emphasize that while the telegram's information had the appearance of authenticity, the *TOI* article carefully avoided definitive attribution ("it only says that the statement 'is reported to be' so and so"). Nonetheless, they defended against any criticism by directing reader attention to whether the police "allowed to leak out news which should never have been given while the accused man is awaiting trial."<sup>546</sup> While the newspaper explained they were more worried about igniting further communal violence and threats to public safety,

---

<sup>544</sup> "Abdul Rashid's Statement: 'Zealous Musalman'" *TOI*, December 29, 1926.

<sup>545</sup> "Abdul Rashid's Statement: 'Zealous Musalman'" *TOI*, December 29, 1926.

<sup>546</sup> "Abdul Rashid's Statement," *TOI*, December 30, 1926.

there was no denying the potential to bias Indians against the defendant and convict him in the court of public opinion. By the time the trial began, Rashid's admission of culpability had changed—and police theories on his precise motivations underwent multiple iterations. By the end of January, Rashid would deny having shot Shradhanand altogether.<sup>547</sup>

The witnesses for the prosecution told a consistent story in both lower and sessions courts. Having briefly left the hospital, Dharam Singh recounted Rashid's arrival at the house, his insistence on talking with Shradhanand about Islam, his request for water, and finally his shooting Shradhanand in bed. Dharam Singh tackled Rashid and was shot once in the leg struggle. Another servant in the house, Dharampal [heard the gunshot?] joined the struggle, allowing an injured Dharam Singh to run for help.<sup>548</sup> The very first witness examined, Meharchand Puri, recounted Singh bursting into the All India Shuddhi Sabha (AISS) office. When Puri and his colleagues arrived at Shradhanand's room, "the Swami lying on a charpoy face downwards" and Dharampal on the floor in a struggle to restrain Rashid.<sup>549</sup> Mere moments before, Swami Chidanand (AISS General Secretary) arrived, coming from his own room close by Shradhanand's. Puri hurried to call the police at Chidanand's direction. Meanwhile, Bala Ram, a local shop keeper had heard the commotion from the street below and ran into the building where he saw Dharam Singh "smeared with

---

<sup>547</sup> "Abdul Rashid's Statement: 'Shy And Unwell.'" *TOI*, January 27, 1927.

<sup>548</sup> "News From The Courts: Shradhanand Murder Trial At Delhi Plea Of Lunacy Advanced On Behalf Of Accused," *TOI*, January 13, 1927; "More Witnesses Examined: Abdul Rashid's Trial," *TOI*, January 26, 1927.

<sup>549</sup> "Shradhanand Murder Case: Trial Commences First Witness Makes A Statement," *TOI*, January 12, 1927; "More Witnesses Examined: Abdul Rashid's Trial," *TOI*, January 26, 1927.

blood, crying that the Swamiji had been killed.” Bala Ram rushed to the Swami’s room, where he demanded of Rashid why he had killed Shradhanand. He repeated for the court that Rashid had replied “the Swami was an enemy of Islam” and murdering him therefore was the “right thing for him to do.” Shradhanand’s own son, Professor Indra, had been among those in the AISS offices; he corroborated Bala Ram’s exchange with Rashid.<sup>550</sup> When the police arrived twenty minutes later, Rashid still held the pistol in his hand, while Dharampal fought to restrain him. Sub-inspector Chet Singh was the first police officer to arrive on scene. He had taken Puri’s call himself and brought a “posse of police” with him. The scene had changed little. Shradhanand’s body remained on his bed and in the corner of the room Dharampal held tight to Rashid with gun in hand. Dharam Singh had returned and lay collapsed on the floor, bleeding from the gunshot wound on his leg. Confronted with Chet Singh’s own revolver, Rashid finally relinquished his weapon and was taken into police custody.<sup>551</sup>

Groundwork was laid for Rashid to plea insanity in early January 1927. A week before the trial began, two editors at the Urdu paper *Allaman* reported that four years earlier Rashid had been dismissed from his position as copy-writer for the paper “on account of his craziness.”<sup>552</sup> Later from the witness stand, the editor would provide specifics of the “strange conduct” for which he fired Rashid, including staring

---

<sup>550</sup> “News From The Courts,” *TOI*, January 13, 1927; “More Witnesses Examined: Abdul Rashid’s Trial,” *TOI*, January 26, 1927.

<sup>551</sup> “News From The Courts,” *TOI*, January 13, 1927; “Abdul Rashid’s Statement: ‘Shy And Unwell.’” *TOI*, January 27, 1927.

<sup>552</sup> “Abdul Rashid’s Statement,” *TOI*, January 27, 1927.

in space, muttering when questioned, and “douch[ing] his head” multiple times during the workday.<sup>553</sup> Counsel for the defense, Mr. Z. Rahman, introduced a plea of “lunacy” on the second day of the trial. He argued that Rashid was out of his right mind “not only at time of assassination, but long before that and even after.” With the court’s permission, Rahman planned to produce no less than 236 witnesses who could attest to Rashid’s mental state (later the number of proposed witnesses to prove Rashid’s lunacy would rise 439).<sup>554</sup> On the following day, January 13, Rahman presented to the court a petition signed by Abdul Wahid, Rashid’s father, explaining that until “an inquiry into his sanity” had been completed, Rashid could not take the stand. The judge denied the request, and ordered Rashid to the witness box—where Rashid remained silent and gazed blankly into space.<sup>555</sup> Rahman tried to avoid the case moving to sessions court on the basis that the prosecution’s witnesses had failed to prove Rashid was sufficiently sane to stand trial.

Prosecution officials insisted the whole thing was a ruse, both Rashid’s behavior in the courtroom and the defense’s plea. They found it suspicious that the question of Rashid’s sanity was only formally introduced on the second day of the lower court. However, Rahman reminded the court that he had requested a few minutes to speak with the defendant on the first day of the trial. Until that point Rashid had not been able to consult with any legal counsel.<sup>556</sup> According to Prosecuting

---

<sup>553</sup> “Plea Of Lunacy: Abdul Rashid’s Defence On Murder Charge,” *TOI*, March 4, 1927.

<sup>554</sup> “News From The Courts,” *TOI*, January 13, 1927; “220 Witnesses For Defence: Delhi Murder Case,” *TOI*, January 18, 1927.

<sup>555</sup> “News From The Courts: Shraddhanand Murder Trial Abdul Rashid Silent,” *TOI*, January 14, 1927.

<sup>556</sup> “Shraddhanand Murder Case,” *TOI*, January 12, 1927.

Inspector Mr. Azizuddin, Rashid was merely “feigning to be lunatic” and “pretending to be insane” to avoid the consequences of his actions.<sup>557</sup> Furthermore, his line of questioning in the lower court intended to prove Rashid’s guilt, not soundness of mind. As a result, the sessions trial required prosecution witnesses demonstrate both Rashid’s guilt of Shradhanand’s murder and his capacity as sufficient to stand trial.<sup>558</sup>

Finally, the court heard from Abdul Rashid himself, first in regards to his behavior in court and second on the question of his guilt. Securing permission to address the court, Rashid said he wanted to explain his earlier silence during questioning, as well as “his alleged insanity.” His failure to respond to questions in the courtroom was due to two reasons. First, he cited dietary changes while in police custody had made him so “unwell” he could not speak. Rashid did not suggest this condition impacted his mental state of mind, but rather that “his mouth and throat were full of saliva” that he could not speak.<sup>559</sup> In addition to these physical symptoms, Rashid described himself “shy” and “generally afraid” in the face of sudden questions. While there is little record regarding Rashid’s physical wellbeing while awaiting trial, the self-description contradicts previous evidence. If anything, reports of the pre-trial Rashid paint a picture of someone all too willing to talk. From a police statement allegedly five typed pages in length to his self-report lengthy talks with Kifayat Ullah to his prompt willingness to answer Bala Ram’s question moments after the deed was done. However, until this point all of this information about Rashid comes to us

---

<sup>557</sup> “News From The Courts: Shradhanand Murder Trial Abdul Rashid Silent,” *TOI*, January 14, 1927.

<sup>558</sup> “Abdul Rashid’s Trial Opens: Formally Charged Discussion Over Plea Of Insanity,” *TOI*, January 25, 1927; “Abdul Rashid’s Statement: ‘Shy And Unwell.’” *TOI*, January 27, 1927.

<sup>559</sup> “Abdul Rashid’s Statement: ‘Shy And Unwell.’” *TOI*, January 27, 1927.

mediated first through either the recollections of witnesses or leaked police reports, and then once more through news media professionals interpreting and printing the information.

When Rashid spoke from the witness stand at last, he told the court and members of the media a very different story about the events of December 23, 1926. He had been framed. According to Rashid, that afternoon he had been “coming from the railway station side” when he passed Shradhdhanand’s home. People were barreling up the road, into the building, and up the stairs at full speed. Having paused briefly by the stairs to see what happened, from upstairs someone called to him “*Mianji, idhar ao.*” Following the call, Rashid reported: “I went up and went into a room. There four persons caught hold of me, gagged me, pushed me and made me fall down. They banged my head against the wall.” Disoriented from the blow to his head, Rashid said, he did not know what happened next. The gap in his memory ended with multiple policemen in the room. The officers arrested and photographed him. He denied ownership of the pistol. Rashid recalled “saying my prayers, as I had thought I was dying then and wanted to say *namaz* before it.” At the end of his testimony, he told the court that he had no witnesses to call. His counsel quickly contradicted Rashid.<sup>560</sup>

Despite Rashid’s claim to innocence, the defense strategy did not challenge the veracity of the accusations. Instead they focused on proving Rashid as mentally unwell. After a one month recess, the trial resumed on March 3, 1927. Bar-at-Law Mr. Raufali explained instead that “the line taken by the defence throughout would be that

---

<sup>560</sup> J.J. Skemp, AIR 1927 Lahore 567: Rashid v Emperor.; “Abdul Rashid’s Statement: ‘Shy And Unwell.’” *TOI*, January 27, 1927.

the accused was mentally unfit to stand trial.”<sup>561</sup> Witnesses for the defense included several professional acquaintances, among them: one of the Allaman editors who had spoken to the press in early January, an Arabic translator from Rashid’s time working with Hamdard, a writing tutee who had received writing instruction from Rashid for several years, and a colleague from the copy writers association. All told stories of minor incidents that, if nothing else, indicated poor emotional regulation in the work place.<sup>562</sup>

Things were also not well in the Rashid family home. Additional witnesses recounted Rashid’s arguments with his wife (and that she had left for her parents’ house), at least one instances where neighbors climbed through a window to rescue Rashid’s young son from his father’s beating, and Rashid’s inquiries into placing his son in an orphanage.<sup>563</sup> Mere weeks before his attack on Shradhdhanand, Rashid went to Aligarh to visit his daughter, who had been sick. Nawabali (Rashid’s son-in-law) reported that when he arrived, Rashid insisted his daughter wasn’t actually ill. Rashid had seen in a dream that either Nawab Ali had either died or divorced Rashid’s daughter.<sup>564</sup> Although his father had signed the petition presented on the second day of court, neither Rashid’s father nor his brother testified in the trial.

Finally, it was time for the mental health expert from Lahore to comment on Rashid’s soundness of mind. The Delhi sessions court proceedings had paused for the

---

<sup>561</sup> “Plea Of Lunacy: Abdul Rashid’s Defence On Murder Charge,” *TOI*, March 4, 1927.

<sup>562</sup> “Plea Of Lunacy: Abdul Rashid’s Defence On Murder Charge,” *TOI*, March 4, 1927.

<sup>563</sup> “Plea Of Lunacy: Abdul Rashid’s Defence On Murder Charge,” *TOI*, March 4, 1927; It is unclear in the records if these incidents refer to the same child or two different sons.

<sup>564</sup> “Rashid On Trial: Mental Expert Says No Insanity,” *TOI*, March 7, 1927.

month of February in order to eventually set to rest the question of whether Rashid was sane enough to stand trial. His insanity plea hanging in the balance, Rashid went to the Lahore Lunatic Asylum for evaluation.<sup>565</sup> Rashid returned to Delhi in the company of police guard after two weeks observation by a mental health expert in Lahore.<sup>566</sup> Dr. Patch met with Rashid for roughly sixty minutes each day during Rashid's stay in the Lahore asylum. Based on those conversations, Dr. Patch shared his official conclusions from the witness stand: Rashid "was not insane and did not suffer from any type of insanity including paranoia."<sup>567</sup>

The defense's closing arguments relied upon two distinct claims, both of which required the other to save Rashid from a guilty verdict. They tried to reconcile Patch's expert testimony with that of defense witnesses by emphasizing that Rashid did not need to be "insane at all times... if it could be proved that the accused was having fits of insanity." While Patch could testify to Rashid's mental soundness of mind in February 1927, he could not state definitely if Rashid was also sane on December 23, 1926. Arguing for the defense, Mr. Sallen of Lahore maintained that by law, someone was considered insane in the absence of clear motive, lack of premeditation, no attempt at concealment, and without accomplices. This point relied on convincing the court of a second distinct claim—that communal tensions were not sufficient motivation for murder of any sane person:

Accused had no personal gain in murdering the Swami nor any personal grudge against the deceased. The allegation of the prosecution was that it was

---

<sup>565</sup> "Abdul Rashid Sent To Lahore: For Medical Observation," *TOI*, January 29, 1927; "Alleged Assassin Of Swami Shradhdhanand Brought Back To Delhi," *TOI*, February 16, 1927.

<sup>566</sup> "Rashid On Trial: Mental Expert Says No Insanity," *TOI*, March 7, 1927.

<sup>567</sup> "Rashid On Trial: Mental Expert Says No Insanity," *TOI*, March 7, 1927.

religious hatred that provided a motive for murder. Religious hatred could not be any ground for murder as people ordinarily differed in faith but did not murder each other. Religious hatred when developed to the extent of madness could lead a man to murder, but madness was a state when the mind ceased to function properly and rationally, and as such a man could not be punished.<sup>568</sup>

In other words, the defense counsel argued that no sane person would have done what Rashid allegedly did for the reasons provided—thus, even if the court concluded he had murdered Shraddhanand, that same conclusion in turn proved Rashid’s mental incapacity.

Afterwards, the prosecution turned the court’s attention to several communal riots in Delhi in recent years and the people who lost their lives simply due to holding disparate religious beliefs. The public prosecutor painted a vivid image for all listening:

A man from Faiz [Bazar] walks a distance of a mile and a half to reach Burn Bastion Road where the deceased resided, and in doing so meets many a man, both Hindus and Muslims, none of whom is molested by him. He enters the Swami’s house and first meet[s] Dharamsingh who is not murdered. He coolly talks to Dharamsingh and to the deceased and has a drink of water and then rushes and shoots at the deceased. After his arrest he talks for three hours to Deputy Superintendent of Police... .. *If a man was let off because he murdered another in religious madness then the life of nobody would be safe in India, where communal rioting had become the rule lately* (emphasis added)<sup>569</sup>

In addition to questioning the second premise of the defense argument, there had been ample evidence of premeditation. In addition, when Rashid’s inquired about Shraddhanand’s address both on the day of the murder and the day prior, he had carried a gun with him on the visit. Finally, the prosecutor cited a recent decision of the Lahore High Court, which held that in cases of insanity the defense counsel needed

---

<sup>568</sup> “A Divided Verdict: Rashid’s Trial Judgment Reserved For A Week,” *TOI*, March 9, 1927.

<sup>569</sup> “A Divided Verdict,” *TOI*, March 9, 1927.

“to prove that at the time of murder the accused was incapable of understanding the nature of the deed.”<sup>570</sup> In conclusion, even if the court felt convinced that Rashid was a “lunatic,” the case had not been made that he was sufficiently insane as to not comprehend his own actions.

The court appointed assessors were divided. Having adjourned for ten short minutes, the assessors returned to render a mixed decision. Two assessors, Mr. Singha and Mr. Sinclair, found Rashid guilty and sane. Mr. Nayaz Mohammed concurred that Rashid had murdered Shradhanand, but was uncertain if the prosecution had proved soundness of mind. And then dissenting from his colleagues, Mr. Khwaja Abdul Majid found the prosecutor’s “story untrue and unconvincing,” but did believe that Rashid was perfectly aware of his actions and wholly sane.<sup>571</sup> The sessions judge then took one week to weigh their recommendations and the facts of the case.

On March 14, 1927, Judge Johnstone delivered his decision: guilty and sane. Johnstone sentenced Rashid to death without hesitation. Regarding the sentence, he told the court:

No extenuating circumstances exist. The murder was done deliberately and ruthlessly on a victim, whom the accused sought out and found lying seriously ill in bed and in a helpless condition. I sentence Abdul Rashid to be hanged by the neck till he be dead.<sup>572</sup>

---

<sup>570</sup> Tola Ram v The Crown [1927] *Indian Law Reports* Vol 8 Lahore 684-693: Tola Ram’s defense bears several similarities to that of Abdul Rashid’s. Tola Ram claimed a gap in his memory between arriving at the crime scene and shortly after the murder. Numerous witnesses attested convincingly that Tola Ram had indeed suffered from “mental ailments” for an extended period of time prior to the November 1926 murder of his father. However, on appeal the justices concluded that there was no evidence that at the time of the act itself Tola Ram had been “incapable” of knowing what he was doing, that it was wrong, or that it was illegal.

<sup>571</sup> “A Divided Verdict,” *TOI*, March 9, 1927.

<sup>572</sup> “Sentenced To Death: Abdul Rashid Swami Murder Case Judgment Appeal To Be Filed,” *TOI*, March 15, 1927.

## Execution

Immediately after the courts sentenced Abdul Rashid to be hanged, Delhi officials began to make special preparations for the execution. Normally, regulations stipulated that executions would take place in the district jail corresponding with where the prisoner was held following sentencing by the court—any exceptions had to be issued as part of the warrant of execution itself.<sup>573</sup> Officials worried that hanging Rashid in Delhi could ignite new violence between the city’s Hindus and Muslims. Therefore, they sought arrangements for Rashid’s execution to take place somewhere “situated at some considerable distance from Delhi.”<sup>574</sup> Since the city of Delhi itself had previously fallen under the auspices of Punjab, certain administrative duties remained closely linked. Of particular relevance in this scenario, the Inspector General of Prisons for the Punjab still oversaw Delhi Jail, thus making such an exception an administrative option. Punjab and Delhi officials planned to hang Rashid in May 1927 at an undisclosed location in the Punjab, so they could avoid further violent clashes in Delhi.<sup>575</sup> Or so they believed. Multiple legal appeals delayed the execution as Rashid exhausted every legal avenue available to him. He appealed first to the Punjab High Court, whose judgment confirming the lower court’s sentence did not arrive until Punjab was facing communal tensions at least as severe as those in Delhi.<sup>576</sup>

---

<sup>573</sup> Punjab Government (India), *Manual for the Superintendence and Management of Jails in the Punjab*, 1933, Paragraph 865(2) IOR/V/27/171/86, BL.

<sup>574</sup> A.M. Stow (Chief Commissioner of Delhi), Report on the disturbances at Delhi on the Occasion of the Execution of Abdul Rashid, November 23, 1927, CC/Confidential/Home/B/1927/18, DSA.

<sup>575</sup> Stow, Report on the disturbances at Delhi on the Occasion of the Execution of Abdul Rashid.

<sup>576</sup> J.J. Skemp, AIR 1927 Lahore 567: Rashid v Emperor.

Rashid's appeal to the Punjab high court mirrored his defense in Delhi's session court even though his counsel had changed. A.S. Osborne and Zafrulla Khan challenged the lower court's pronouncements on two counts: 1) insufficient evidence for conviction of murder; 2) insanity at the time even "if he did commit the murder." Given the Captain Lodge Patch's expert opinion that Rashid was perfectly sane, they appealed that Rashid "was liable to temporary fits of insanity" due to smoking cannabis. Judges Broadway and Skemp were ultimately as unmoved as the lower court. On May 26, 1927 they rejected Rashid's appeal because "the fact that accused is conceited, odd and irascible, and his brain was not quite all right, it cannot be said that he was incapable of knowing that murder was wrong." Rashid's conviction stood and he was yet again not exempted from criminal responsibility under IPC 84.<sup>577</sup>

By late spring 1927 Punjab's own communal tensions became a barrier to hosting Rashid's execution. In May, an ostensibly isolated dispute between a Muslim and a Sikh resulted in three dead and five wounded in Lahore. Concerned that the funeral would draw a volatile crowd gathering, Muslim leaders rescheduled the subsequent funerals at the last minute in the hope to minimize the size of the crowd. Nonetheless, approximately 10,000 Muslims gathered to pray for the dead. When the crowds dispersed to their respective corners of the city, reports of "murderous assaults" on Hindus came from all over. After ten days of curfews and increased police presence, the violence that followed the funeral amounted to at least twenty-seven dead and over two-hundred wounded—most of whom were Hindus.<sup>578</sup> The

---

<sup>577</sup> J.J. Skemp, AIR 1927 Lahore 567: Rashid v Emperor.

<sup>578</sup> Confidential: Report on the Political Situation in the Punjab for the fortnight ending the 15th May

violence committed in this instance no doubt drew in part from the sense of outrage by Muslims following the April 1927 acquittal of the infamous publisher of *Rangila Rasul*.<sup>579</sup> Well into the summer, thousands attended a meeting at Lahore's Badshahi mosque where officials described at least one speaker as delivering a speech "containing practically direct incitement to murder Hindus who insulted the Prophet." Given these circumstances, officials in the Punjab were reluctant to host the execution and funeral for a Muslim convicted of murdering a prominent Hindu reformer. The Punjab Government withdrew its willingness to host Rashid's hanging.<sup>580</sup>

In a last attempt to avoid the death penalty, Rashid filed a final appeal with the Privy Council. This appeal was also unsuccessful and only managed to delay Rashid's death sentence until November.<sup>581</sup> No longer able to carry out the execution in Punjab, Delhi officials concluded they had no other alternative location. Despite being immediately adjacent to the United Provinces, they did not even consider approaching UP officials with the request to host Rashid's execution two primary reasons. First, they lacked pre-established administrative connections with UP that were in any way comparable to those between the governments of Delhi and Punjab. Secondly, they assessed the United Provinces was itself "a hotbed of communal agitation, and the

---

1927, Home/Political/1927-May/File 32, NAI.

<sup>579</sup> On the pathologizing of Muslim outrage in the *Rangila Rasul* case, see Julia Stephens, *Governing Islam: Law, Empire, and Secularism in Modern South Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 137–47.

<sup>580</sup> Stow, Report on the disturbances at Delhi on the Occasion of the Execution of Abdul Rashid.

<sup>581</sup> "Appeal To The Privy Council: Swami's Murder Lord Oxford's Son As Counsel," *TOI*, August 16, 1927; "Appeal Of Abdul Rashid Rejected," *TOI*, October 27, 1927.

slightest hitch in carrying out the arrangements would have resulted in creating more storm centers than one.”<sup>582</sup> The execution had to happen within Delhi.

Reluctantly, Delhi officials turned to the next logistical quandary of the execution: where to bury Rashid’s body. Whether an executed criminal’s family or friends could dispose of their corpse depended on judgment by the magistrate that there were no “special reasons to the contrary.” Relatives could receive the body for private burial or burning only so long as judicial officials deemed it unlikely for the funeral to transform into some manner of public demonstration. Bombay’s Prison Manual was more explicit than most, specifying that those who received the body did so strictly “on the understanding that the last rites are performed in a perfectly private manner without an procession, pomp, public demonstration, or any kind of display.”<sup>583</sup> For the most part manuals were silent regarding both the administrative application process to receive the body of an executed convict and the physical corpse hand off—with the notable exception of Burma which the body would be “carried outside the main gate and there delivered over” to waiting relatives.<sup>584</sup> If no one stepped forward to collect the corpse and there were no fears of public demonstrations, then some regulations stipulated neither burial nor burning, simply that “local arrangements” be made.<sup>585</sup>

Rashid’s family members had themselves submitted a petition that his body “be buried quietly without process.”<sup>586</sup> Delhi officials weighed two options: burial

---

<sup>582</sup> Stow, Report on the disturbances at Delhi on the Occasion of the Execution of Abdul Rashid.

<sup>583</sup> Section 590, *Bombay Jail Manual* extract enclosed in No 11 71/33-Jails, IOR/L/PJ/7/476, BL.

<sup>584</sup> Section 825, *Burma Jail Manual* extract enclosed in No 11 71/33-Jails, IOR/L/PJ/7/476, BL.

<sup>585</sup> Section 692C of the *Bengal Jail Manual* and Section 520(a)&(b) of the *United Provinces Jail Manual*, extracts enclosed in No 11 71/33-Jails, IOR/L/PJ/7/476, BL.

<sup>586</sup> Stow, Report on the disturbances at Delhi on the Occasion of the Execution of Abdul Rashid.

within the jail or handing the body over to Rashid's relatives. Officials concluded that a jail burial "would [have been] so contrary to ordinary usage" that it would beyond a doubt lead to "increasing the circle of [Rashid's] sympathizers." As a result, they agreed to hand the body over to Rashid's relatives for burial. They dictated use of a Muslim cemetery located directly opposite the jail grounds and required that the family carry the corpse "direct to the grave" without any procession. Barring compliance with those terms, they threatened to otherwise bury Rashid inside the jail. At the same time, they weren't ready to commit to whether in such a circumstance the jail yard burial would "temporarily or permanently" be Rashid's resting place.

With the execution and burial locations settled, concerns remained. Delhi needed to prepare "for dealing with possible disturbance arising out of the execution and the subsequent burial of the corpse." Despite describing violent clashes as merely "possible," in reality officials indicated that they always viewed such trouble as a certainty. It wasn't a matter of *if*, but rather a matter of *when* and *where*. It was also a matter of trying to "forecast accurately the nature of the disturbance." Officials felt relatively confident that the cemetery itself posed little risk—especially since, by handing Rashid's corpse over the relatives, the burial would conform "in every way to the rite accorded by ordinary Muslims." They calculated that more likely trouble would start as any funeral "spectators" returned from the cemetery.<sup>587</sup> On the appointed day, police took up positions outside the jail itself and at picket stations throughout the city. Delhi officials believed that they had arranged to make both

---

<sup>587</sup> Stow, Report on the disturbances at Delhi on the Occasion of the Execution of Abdul Rashid.

Rashid’s “execution and burial as unobtrusive as possible.” That they proceeded with the execution and continued to plan to turn Rashid’s body over to the family indicated a measure of confidence that large scale disruptions in Delhi could be avoided.



Map 5.11: Route from Delhi jail to designated cemetery. Rashid’s family had agreed to bury his body at a Muslim graveyard nearby. Prescribed route from the jail (A) to the nearby cemetery (B) was less than half a kilometer.

Penultimate preparations occurred on the evening of November 13. Delhi officials maintained concerns that the mere presence of Rashid’s family members at the jail or execution itself could provide an “excuse for delay” at the cemetery or en route to it.<sup>588</sup> Perhaps they worried about prolonged goodbyes or dramatic displays of familial grief that could slow the funeral’s schedule or work spectators into a frenzy. On the eve of the execution, police warned Rashid’s relatives that they “would not see [him] alive again.” The records remain silent as to whether the relatives were informed sufficiently ahead of time such that they could say their goodbyes, or if the notification came as a complete surprise. The notification Sunday evening contradicted a police

---

<sup>588</sup> Stow, Report on the disturbances at Delhi on the Occasion of the Execution of Abdul Rashid.

report stating that earlier on November 13 authorities promised Rashid's family the opportunity to be "allowed a final interview" with him early on the morning of the 14.<sup>589</sup> This inconsistency of the records points to either a last-minute change of plans or poor coordination between officials involved in the execution.

Finally, the designated day arrived: Monday, November 14. The time of year determined the time for all executions in Punjab. Under different circumstances, had officials managed to arrange for a summer execution during the lengthy days between early May and late August, the execution would have been scheduled for 6am. In March, April, September, and October, Punjab executions took place at 7am. As a November hanging, Rashid's execution would take place at the beginning of a four month window when the days were shorter and executions took place at 8am. By contrast, jail manuals for Bengal, Assam, and the Central Provinces only specified that executions should take place either "in the early morning" or "as soon after daybreak as possible." Bombay's manual made no reference to time of day at all.<sup>590</sup>

Crowds began to form early on the morning of November 14 ahead of the 8am execution. While some collected on the road side across from the jail itself, others gathered at the cemetery in anticipation of the burial.<sup>591</sup> Anticipating critiques from their higher ups, Delhi officials later argued that true crowd control would have been impracticable. The cemetery and jail both were "surrounded by open country on all

---

<sup>589</sup> R.R. Morgan, Special Report of an Offence, November 15, 1927, Police Department, Delhi District, CC/Confidential/Home/B/1927/18, DSA.

<sup>590</sup> The Assam Jail Manual, I:195–96; The Bengal Jail Code, 1:326; Bombay Jail Manual In The Bombay Presidency Part I, 178–84.

<sup>591</sup> Stow, Report on the disturbances at Delhi on the Occasion of the Execution of Abdul Rashid.

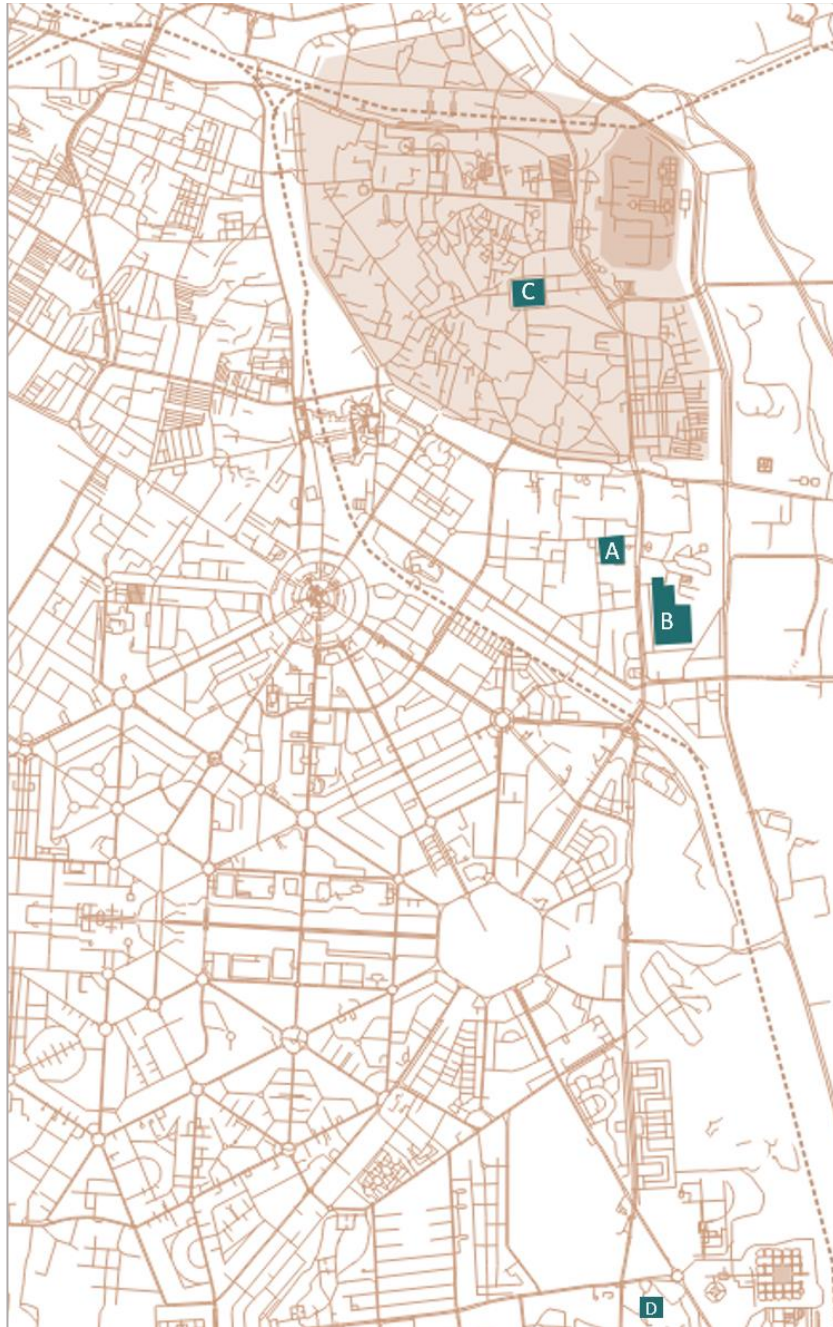
sides so that access to the spot [was] easy, and practically impossible to prevent.” Generally, wide-open space around detention centers might seem preferable, as they make it easier for guards to lay eyes on anyone approaching from a greater distance. Likewise, lack of cover (whether manmade or natural) deprives potential escapees of cover. In this case, however, it made it all the more difficult for Delhi’s police to limit public access to the cemetery—and in turn, more difficult to control the crowd.

### **Inhumation**

In accordance with regulations, Rashid’s body hung limp for one hour. Shortly after 9am, jail officials admitted Rashid’s relatives so that they could prepare his body for burial. During this time, the crowd continued to swell in size. Within an hour, reports estimated that between five and eight thousand people had gathered at the jail and the approved burial ground across the road. According to a police report the next day, officers learned that members of the crowd supported taking Rashid’s corpse to either Jama Masjid to Nizamuddin.<sup>592</sup> Just as the body was ready for burial, the crowd control situation seemingly took a turn for the worst, with members of the crowd damaging the exterior of the jail—and soon thereafter breaching the jail compound itself.

---

<sup>592</sup> Morgan, Special Report of an Offence, November 15, 1927.

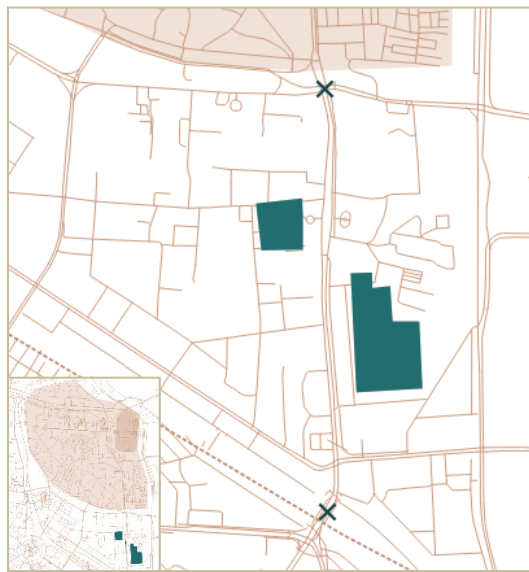


Map 5.12: Map of New and Old Delhi. Evidence shows that at least some members of the crowd wanted to bring Rashid's body to either Jama Masjid (C) for prayer or Nizamuddin for burial (D). Either of these routes would directly defy government the order that Rashid's corpse go directly from the Jail (A) to a specific nearby burial ground (B).

It wasn't as if Delhi officials had expected the whole day to run smoothly.

After all, they had felt it worthwhile to try to relocate the entire execution in order to avoid potential violence in the city. Among the preparations leading up to hanging

Abdul Rashid, the commanding officer at the Red Fort “had been warned the night before that troops might be required.”<sup>593</sup> But authorities remained convinced that the only risk to public peace was from spectators returning to the city after the funeral. So long as the actual handling of Rashid’s body, from cleaning to interment, “conformed” with the religious rites of Indian Muslims, the funeral itself posed no risk. In light of this miscalculation, before releasing the body officials at the jail requested the Fort dispatch the troops on standby in a section of armored cars. They directed half of the cars north of the jail to Delhi Gate (to block the path to Jama Masjid), and sent the other half south of the jail to the Railway Bridge (to block the path to Nizamuddin).



Map 5.13: Location of armored cars, which were dispatched to either end of Muttra Road, ostensibly to control the movement of Rashid’s corpse.

In the interim, officials announced that Rashid’s body would not be released until all members of the public vacated the jail compound. When the crowd showed no signs of compliance, apparently Rashid’s own father asked people to go outside of the

---

<sup>593</sup> Stow, Report on the disturbances at Delhi on the Occasion of the Execution of Abdul Rashid.

jail so that his son's body could be buried.<sup>594</sup> This appeal from another Muslim proved more effective, and in a short period of time, all trespassers had returned to the roadside. Anticipating the posting of troops at either end of Muttra Road, officials cleared the Rashid family to leave the jail grounds for the cemetery.

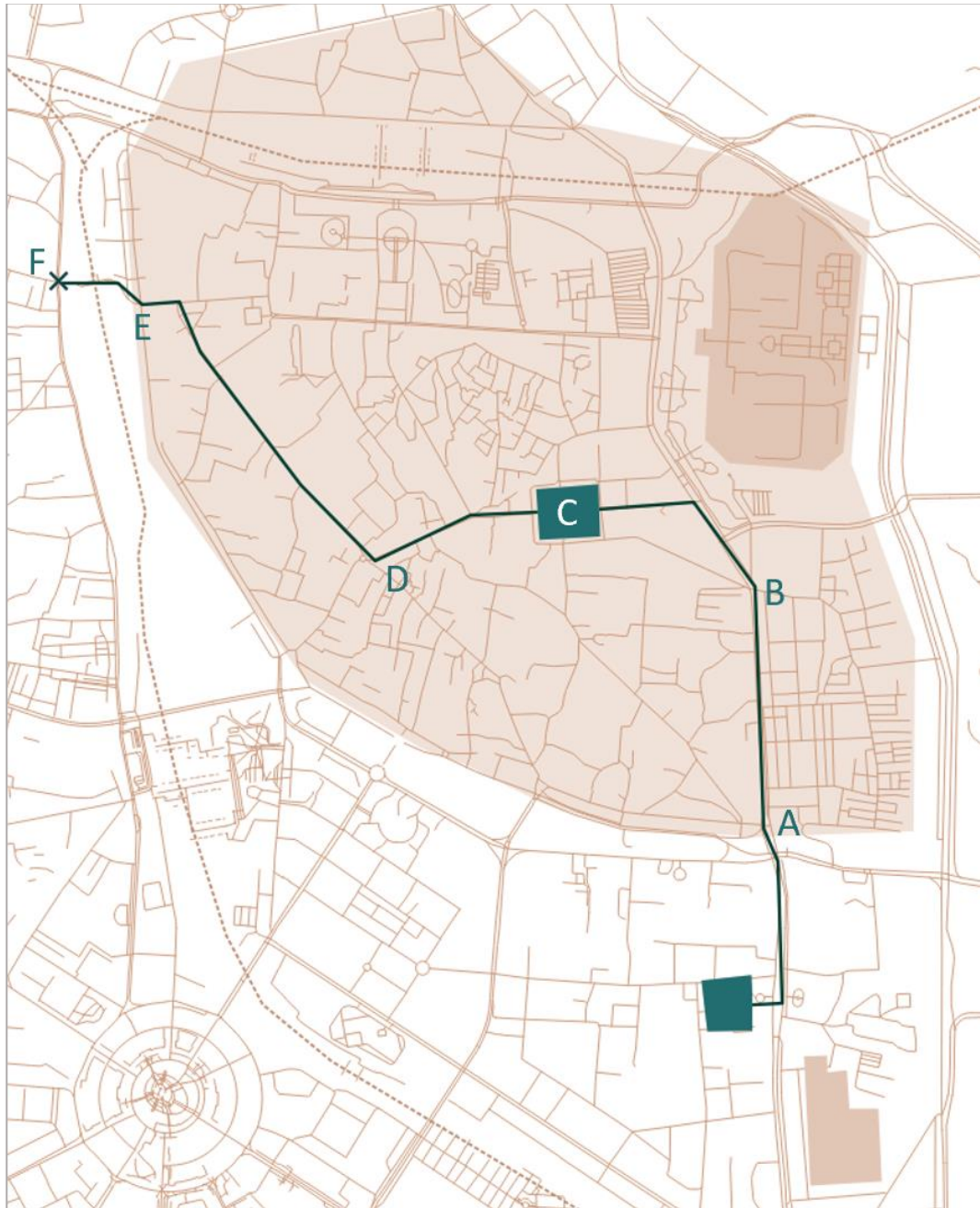
Before the family even reached the road, members of the crowd seized the funeral bier with Rashid's corpse and made a mad dash north towards the walls of the Old City and Jama Masjid. Beyond Delhi Gate (see Map 5.14: A), the crowd surged north through Faiz Bazaar, then west (B). Within Jama Masjid (C), they paused for an instant, as if to lower the body and pray, before rushing straight out the other side with the authorities in hot pursuit. At Chowk Hauz Qazi (D) they turned northward again towards Fatehpuri Masjid, where they turned west a final time, pouring out Lahori Gate (E) just as the retinue of armored cars was catching up. By then the crowd around the body had shrunken. Some could not keep pace with the men running with the bier. Others split off to loot storefronts and assault Hindus on the street. A good number were diverted towards Ajmeri Gate by a quick-thinking police officer at Chowk Hauz Qazi.<sup>595</sup> The remaining bier carriers successfully brushed off the police from the armored cars and hurried across a bridge over train tracks. Then, finally, the illicit procession came to a sudden halt. Army trucks blocked the westside of the bridge (F). And the police had rallied to close off the east side of the bridge, and thus any access back through Lahori Gate. Delhi authorities repossessed Rashid's corpse, arrested over

---

<sup>594</sup> A. Isar, *Crown v Ghulam Rasul & 49 others*, April 20, 1928, File 3/VII of 1928, Home/Political/1928, NAI.

<sup>595</sup> A. Isar, *Crown v Ghulam Rasul & 49 others*, April 20, 1928.

100 individuals, and transported the body back to the prescribed graveyard for final burial. In the months that followed, the state charged fifty-nine men for their involvement in the disruption. Charges ranged from unlawful assembly and ignoring police orders to use of a deadly weapon and causing “grievous hurt.”



Map 5.14: Route of impromptu funeral. In defiance of colonial orders, the crowd bearing Rashid's corpse went into and through the old city: Delhi Gate (A), Faiz Bazaar (B), Jama Masjid (C), Chowk Hauz Qazi (D), Lahori Gate (E), and just across Sadar Bridge (F).

In an after-incident report, Stow emphasized two aspects of the government's decision to ultimately release Rashid's body that morning. First, he characterized the crowd as an unrestrained mob that could not be deterred. The Commissioner suggested that the composition of the crowd outside changed over time as the "more respectable elements" who had arrived earlier in the morning were increasingly outnumbered. To corroborate the idea that all indications earlier in the day had pointed to an uneventful burial, Stow quoted an article from the *Hindustan Times* that concluded "police arrangements are adequate and no trouble is apprehended." He explained that since the article was "written presumably after the body had been handed over to relatives," but before the situation escalated, it validated his report that the crowd had become more volatile as the morning progressed.

Prior to forcing their way into the jail compound, some of those gathered outside had first "overturned" the outermost fence around the perimeter of the grounds and "broken down a masonry pillar supporting the gate of the jail compound."<sup>596</sup> Stow claimed that the crowd was worked into such a frenzy, that had officials decided to even temporarily bury Rashid's body within the jail grounds the situation would have endangered every official present. One reader of Stow's report underlined in pencil his assertion that the crowd "would certainly have gutted the quarters outside the jail and

---

<sup>596</sup> Stow, Report on the disturbances at Delhi on the Occasion of the Execution of Abdul Rashid.

than attached the main gate of the jail itself.” These passages make clear that nothing was going to stand between the mob outside and Abdul Rashid’s corpse.

At the same time as implying a level of inevitability, Stow was even more explicit about the unpredictability of the late-morning crowd. According to the chief commission, the crowd’s insistence on taking control of the funeral arrangements “could not have been foreseen” by the colonial state. “No one was prepared,” he insisted for this case of “body snatching,” because, quite simply, it “could never have been anticipated.” This language of unknowability appears prominently in reports from Stow’s subordinates as well. Both the district magistrate and superintendent of police used advance preparations as evidence to validate the impossibility of foresight. They reported having “most carefully made and carried out” “precautions of every kind.” In fact, the day’s ultimate conclusion demonstrated how well-prepared city officials had been. After all, their forces had reclaimed the body “with as little damage to life and property as could be hoped.” While these officials all appeared to be in sync on this aspect of the presentation, they were not universally so.

Amid his claims that there was no way to anticipate the actions of the crowd, Stow acknowledges only one possible route in his report: south to Nizamuddin. Tying this potentiality to the changing composition of the crowd, Stow explained why officials had dispatched half the armored car unit south of the jail to Railway Bridge:

Some reserve of police was occasions by a request made by a certain section of the crowd that the body might be taken to Nizamuddin, a well known shrine situated on Muttra Road some 3 miles distance. This situation, which could not have been foreseen , had of course a unfortunate effect in detailing a force

which might have been useful at Delhi Gate.<sup>597</sup>

At no point in the report did Stow himself indicate that officials had any advance notice that some among the crowd wanted to bring Rashid's body north into the city, even though just a page prior had Stow noted that the police had sent armored cars to both Delhi Gate and Railway Bridge.

This omission is all the more striking when compared alongside evidence that both city authorities and the press were aware of Jama Masjid as a possibility. In a report filed the very next day, Delhi police described the information they had garnered that morning:

From general talk it was ascertained that there was a feeling [among the crowd] in favor of taking the body either to Jama Masjid of prayers or to Nizamuddin for interment.<sup>598</sup>

If we were to give Stow the benefit of the doubt, we might imagine that, the rumors about Nizamuddin could have started earlier in the morning or were more prominently expressed. Maybe that "section of the crowd" was more vocal, more aggressive in their demands? Even then, if there had been a rationale for finding one possibility more convincing than the other, why not explain that while defending your administration to superiors in London? For all the space Stow dedicated to swearing none of this could have been anticipated, he never explained why troops were sent to Delhi Gate at all.

Ironically, a close reading of the quoted *Hindustan Times* article reveals that Stow's corroborating evidence also undermined his narrative. As I mentioned previously, Stow intended the brief except to validate a version of events in which

---

<sup>597</sup> Stow, Report on the disturbances at Delhi on the Occasion of the Execution of Abdul Rashid.

<sup>598</sup> Morgan, Special Report of an Offence, November 15, 1927.

there was no way to anticipate the crowd's actions on the morning of November 14, 1927. Even the press, he implied, thought "police arrangements [were] adequate" and there would be "no trouble" burying Rashid. He drew rather less attention, however, the same article's foreshadowing of what was to come:

Although a section of the Muslims were in favor of taking the corpse to the Jama Masjid against the official order that the body must be interred in the Muslim graveyard just opposite the Central Jail, it was finally agreed that the official order should be obeyed. Police authorities are determined not to allow the corpse to be taken to the city.<sup>599</sup>

In capturing a single moment of that morning as understood by a journalist, the excerpt makes clear that the police were already aware of the possibility of taking the body into the city. In his own recounting of the morning, District Magistrate Johnson noted how once Rashid's body was northbound "it was of course assumed and indeed reported as a practical certainty that the body was being taken to the Jama Masjid for prayers."<sup>600</sup>

In addition to failing to respond sooner to actionable intelligence, Delhi authorities appeared initially outmatched by the fervor of the crowd. Stow attributed the crowd's initial success to its use of "rush tactics" and "employing the funeral bier as a battering ram."<sup>601</sup> He described Mr. Orde, Senior Superintendent of Police, himself grabbing hold of the bier, being thrown to the ground, and requiring rescue. Other officers were tripped, pushed, and literally had their arms twisted behind their backs. Government of India Home Secretary, Harry Graham Haig, was skeptical of

---

<sup>599</sup> Stow, Report on the disturbances at Delhi on the Occasion of the Execution of Abdul Rashid.

<sup>600</sup> Stow, Report on the disturbances at Delhi on the Occasion of the Execution of Abdul Rashid.

<sup>601</sup> Stow, Report on the disturbances at Delhi on the Occasion of the Execution of Abdul Rashid.

local officials and their preparedness. While not “wishing to impute any blame,” Haig did “not think it is possible to hold, as [the magistrate] suggests, that every possible precaution had been taken.”<sup>602</sup> Similarly, following months of witness testimony in the prosecution of many of the men involved in theft of Rashid’s body, the presiding magistrate painted a less generous picture of both police and military competence.

At the Delhi gate, another attempt was made to check the onward rush of the crowd. Four armored cars and 40 bayonets should have had better success but apparently this machinery too broke down and the crowd rushed past them before the military rose to the situation and in no time the mob reached Jama Masjid followed by the police.<sup>603</sup>

Even after the police called in martial reinforcements, their efforts at crowd control shattered ineffectively. Why?

Despite their lengthy presence in the region, British administrators had failed to appreciate the multiplicity of relationships that made up colonial Delhi’s necrogeography. This is not to say that they imagined Rashid’s death and burial were to happen in vacuum. Their calculations accounted for his death in the context of familial relationships and in the broadest sense of religious belonging as an incendiary factor amid ongoing Hindu-Muslim communal clashes.

Since the 1850s, official prison policies applicable to Delhi had mandated that those close to Rashid, both family and friends, had some amount of legitimate claim on his body. In the records, Delhi officials made no indication that they ever planned to wholly deny his relatives of that right. At the same time, it seems that the threat of

---

<sup>602</sup> Harry Graham Haig, Internal Memo, November 26, 1927, File 3/VII of 1928, Home/Political/1928, NAI.

<sup>603</sup> A. Isar, *Crown v Ghulam Rasul & 49 others*, April 20, 1928.

withholding the body was at least implied, if not explicitly stated. Early on, Rashid's family had at one point "applied for permission to take over the body on any conditions which the authorities might impose."<sup>604</sup> The state granted their request with the two stipulations: 1) there would be no procession and 2) the family would take the body directly to the designated cemetery just across the road. Given the absence of burial grounds within the jail grounds, it is unclear from the archival record what measures might have been taken if Rashid's family refused to the government's conditions. Some records allude to the possibility of burying Rashid within the compound on a temporary basis, but local authorities never seemed to seriously entertain it as a viable option. On the day before the execution, Rashid's family signed or otherwise made their mark on a contract which documented the terms to which they had agreed.

If officials had originally intended on permitting the family to see Rashid on the morning of his execution, the final forty-eight hours before hand may have given them pause. Rumors circulated throughout the city that Rashid had already been executed on Saturday November 12th. The roughly 1,000 Muslims who gathered at the jail's gate made "evident that a considerable crowd might be expected to attend the funeral when it actually took place."<sup>605</sup> On that same day, Rashid's family attempted to renegotiate the terms of agreement. They "demanded" permission to take Rashid's corpse to their house for preparation for burial instead of washing it within the

---

<sup>604</sup> Morgan, Special Report of an Offence, November 15, 1927.

<sup>605</sup> No 24-15: Special Report of an Offence; "Moslem Interest In Abdul Rashid," *TOI*, November 14, 1927.

impersonal confines of Delhi's central jail.<sup>606</sup> Officials informed Rashid's relations that the jail provided ample "facilities for the washing and preparation of the body." Under "no circumstances" could they expected to be granted such a privilege. Only on November 13, with less than twenty-four hours before the execution, did Rashid's family agree in writing to the state's conditions. Familial intimacy aside, acquiescing to the last-minute stipulation by Rashid's family further complicated the government's already nebulous ability to maintain control of the corpse and prevent potential protests.

In terms of potential public unrest, authorities understood Rashid's actual burial in broad communalist terms. There was a sense that any large gathering of people in the city could rapidly descend into violence. As Deputy Superintendent of Police Rai Bahadur Malik Devi Dayal testified:

Over the most trivial matters rival communities rush at each others throats and it has become necessary to make special Police arrangements whenever there is any gathering of the people, such as a mela, a meeting or conference, as there us a constant fear of a riot over any small matter. It is come to this that Police arrangements have to be made even on the occasion of funeral and marriage ceremonies.<sup>607</sup>

In keeping with this understanding communalism, there was already an increased police presence in the city in the weeks prior to Rashid's execution. At the start of November police pickets had been stationed throughout the old city as a precautionary measure ahead of the Arya Conference from November 4 to 6 and celebrations for Guru Nanak's birthday on November 8. Officials later pointed to the "absence of

---

<sup>606</sup> Morgan, Special Report of an Offence, November 15, 1927.

<sup>607</sup> A. Isar, Crown v Ghulam Rasul & 49 others, April 20, 1928.

serious trouble” during both events and “care taken to make arrangements” as justification for being caught so off guard.<sup>608</sup>

In some fairness to Delhi officials, some members of the crowd exploited the opportunity afforded by the riot. Some men peeled off as the procession wound its way through the city, choosing to loot Hindu owned shops and assault passersby. Authorities calculated that Hindu vendors in the city lost sustained property losses amounting to Rs. 10,843/-.<sup>609</sup> According to hospital returns, “the mad rush through the streets” injured 54 Hindus and two Muslims (one Hindu died as result of his injuries).<sup>610</sup> Authorities conflated these undeniable acts of violence with the seizure of Rashid’s corpse, presuming they were twin objectives.

This resulted, in part, from a lack of specificity to colonial expectations of violence as part of an unending spiral. In other words, their expectation of violence from Delhi’s Muslims was that it would be borne from retaliation. This logic underpinned earlier efforts to relocate the execution to Punjab, as well as the reasoning for withdrawing that plan. Stow attributed the fracas during Rashid’s burial, at least in part, to “a number of Muhammadan shop-keepers” recently returned from a fair in northeastern United Provinces, where they had been assaulted and robbed by Hindus.

Stow explained:

...there can be no doubt that this unfortunate incident went far to upset the prospects of quiet on the 14<sup>th</sup> November. There can be no doubt that a number of Muhammadans were filled with the idea of revenge against the Hindus

---

<sup>608</sup> Stow, Report on the disturbances at Delhi on the Occasion of the Execution of Abdul Rashid.

<sup>609</sup> J. Crerar Reply to Pandit Thakur Das, Legislative Assembly Debates, February 8, 1928.

<sup>610</sup> Morgan, Special Report of an Offence, November 15, 1927. Later numbers reported in the Legislative Assembly rose to 71 injuries and two deaths.

To reduce the potential for retaliatory violence, none of the police posted at and around the jail on November 14 were Hindus.<sup>611</sup> They presumed that violence would most likely manifest as aggression by one religious community against another as a matter of course. Authorities would have done better to contextualize Rashid's burial in Delhi terms.

### **Intersection**

First and foremost, there was the *raison d'être* for the execution itself: the unnatural death of Swami Shraddhanand the prior December. I argue that by locating relying so heavily on the lens of communalism, officials overlooked a very different common factor: community mourning. The outrage of Delhi's Muslims and the drastic measures they went to in November 1927, become less incomprehensible within an emotive genealogy of public mourning, both chronological and geographical.

Recall the procession from Shraddhanand's residence on Burn Bastion Road to Nigambodh Ghat for cremation lasted around four hours. If we take into account the 1920s roadmap of the city and the few points we know the procession passed through (see Map 5.10), the simplest route from beginning to end spans just over two miles. That the procession took so long suggests either a glacial pace or a more circuitous route was necessary to accommodate the other unnamed "important parts of the city."<sup>612</sup> Even though the precise path taken remains, for now, unknowable, both

---

<sup>611</sup> Stow, Report on the disturbances at Delhi on the Occasion of the Execution of Abdul Rashid.

<sup>612</sup> Demi Official Letter No 5-Confidential to H.G. Haig, January 6, 1927, Home/Political/1926-Dec/File 112, NAI; "The Alleged Murderer's Confession: 'Responsible For Misery Of Mahomedans' Widespread Regret Caused At Death Of Swami Shraddhanand," *TOI*, December 25, 1926; "Six Moslems Arrested For Stone-Throwing: Swami Shraddhanand's Funeral Procession Expressions Of Regret And Sorrow By Hindu And Mahomedan Leaders," *TOI*, December 27, 1926.

possibilities would have amplified the inescapable presence of an already massive funeral procession.

### *THE ASSASSINATION OF SWAMI SHRADDHANAND: FUNERAL SCENES*



Figure 5.17: Photograph of Shradddhanand's funeral procession.<sup>613</sup>

While Abdul Rashid stood trial for murdering a Hindu leader, four Delhi Hindus stood trial for the alleged murder of Mufti Mahbub Ali in the aftermath of Shradddhanand on December 23, 1926. Inspector Nazir ul Haq was nearby when, by around 4pm, he learned two things: 1) a Muslim had murdered Swami Shradddhanand; 2) the murder “had excited some the Hindus, who had in turn started assaulting passing Mussalmans.” At the same time, on Shradddhanand's street, more than four dozen Hindus had gathered near the crime scene. Sub-inspector Saidali Shah tried to intervene and failed when this same crowd assaulted Muslim pedestrians in the area.<sup>614</sup> That evening at least five Muslims were injured in the area between Lahore Gate and

---

<sup>613</sup> “The Assassination Of Swami Shradddhanand: Funeral Scenes,” *TOI*, December 29, 1926

<sup>614</sup> “Alleged Assault On Passers-By: Sequel To Swami Murder,” *TOI*, February 10, 1927.

Khari Baoli.<sup>615</sup> On the morning of December 25th Mahbub Ali, an older man, died from his wounds.<sup>616</sup>

Before the end of January, Muslims in Delhi and Punjab pointed to Hindu hypocrisy in terms of untimely deaths amid communal violence. A Muslim killing a Hindu over religious differences provoked an immediate public outcry from the Hindu community. Leaders in Lahore noted that Hindus were noticeably quiet when Hindus fatally assaulted a Muslim that very same day. They contrasted the vociferous public mourning and collective outrage following the murder of an old Hindu man by a Muslim against the Hindu community's comparative "indifference" to the death of an old Muslim man at the hand of Hindus.<sup>617</sup> They countered Arya Samajist discourse of Shradhanand's martyrdom with their own declaration that Mahbub Ali had in fact been the one "martyred" at the hands of Hindu assailants.<sup>618</sup>

Delhi police charged Raja Ramsingh, Baljit, Sher Singh, and Patu Lal with rioting, causing voluntary hurt to the other injured Muslims, and unlawful assembly. All but Baljit were also charged with the culpable homicide (not murder) of Mahbub Ali. Despite multiple eyewitness accounts, the judge found too many discrepancies in the testimony. Accounts were so inconsistent that it was not even clear when and where one of the defendants had been arrested, let alone the details of the assault. The

---

<sup>615</sup> "Isolated Fights in Delhi," *TOI*, December 24, 1926.

<sup>616</sup> Demi Official Letter No 5-Confidential to H.G. Haig, January 6, 1927, Home/Political/1926-Dec/File 112, NAI. "Affray in Delhi: Death of a Mahomedan," *TOI*, December 27, 1926.

<sup>617</sup> Confidential: Report on the Political Situation in the Punjab for the fortnight ending the 31st January, 1927, Home/Political/1927-Jan/File 32/27, NAI.

<sup>618</sup> "Alleged Murder And Rioting: Formal Charges Framed" *TOI*, February 12, 1927.

magistrate acquitted all four men of all charges. At the same time, he chastened Delhi police, lamenting:

it is a pity that a riot of such importance, resulting in the death of a harmless person, has remained untraced, but perhaps, the investigating agency was too much occupied with the sensational murder of Swami Shraddhanand.<sup>619</sup>

Mufti Mahbub Ali's murder was never solved, reifying public perceptions that the state devalued Muslim lives.

The inability to have a proper funeral procession of any scale for Rashid rankled Delhi's Muslims. Multiple witnesses in the subsequent riot trial alleged to have heard defendant number 34, Qutb Uddin, directly reference Shraddhanand's funeral:

When Swami Shraddhanand died, a procession was taken, so also when Nanak Chand died. There is no reason the procession why the procession should not be allowed and even the saying of funeral prayers at Jama Masjid not allowed in the case of Abdul Rashid.<sup>620</sup>

In response to such provocations, witnesses claimed other members of the crowd replied "Wait till we get the body. We shall then see what we can do."

Multiple witnesses corroborated the sentiment and the corresponding comparisons. More importantly, it resists the government's primary narrative of a frenzied mob seeking revenge on the city's Hindus. How does taking a Muslim body accomplish that? Instead, these lines indicate a desire to lay Rashid's body to rest on their own terms. Even if we accept that some individuals *also* wanted revenge on the Hindu community, there is no indication that those aspirations were inherently linked.

---

<sup>619</sup> "Conflicting Evidence: Four Hindus Acquitted," *TOI*, April 12, 1927.

<sup>620</sup> A. Isar, *Crown v Ghulam Rasul & 49 others*, April 20, 1928, File 3/VII of 1928, Home/Political/1928, NAI.

Most likely, the community repossessed Rashid's corpse with the knowledge and consent of his relatives, and not in violation of their wishes (as the officials claimed). As we saw, the day before the execution the family had requested to bring the body home to Faiz Bazaar to prepare him for burial, to say goodbye on their own terms. The state said no and justified the denial on the basis that appropriate facilities were available on the jail. The authorities thought that was enough: that the material facilities met the requirements of Islamic burial practices. The commissioner and others later pointed out that that Rashid's father and brothers had "signed" a written document agreeing to the state's terms. This proved that the family was satisfied. But what choice did Rashid's relatives have? If they refused to comply, they ran the risk of total strangers preparing Rashid's body for burial.

With the benefit of archival hindsight, we know the state was in no way truly prepared to bury Rashid's body within the jail grounds. Even if the authorities had been prepared, at every juncture they repeatedly failed to recognize the fundamental reason for the funerary process: processing grief collectively. By ascribing communal violence as the crowd's motive, Rashid's executioners ignored the need for Delhi's larger Muslim community to mourn one of their own. That they did so was symptomatic of the colonial state's persistent failure to look beyond the simplistic lens of communal antagonism and account for necrogeographical context.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Danish Siddiqui died covering the Taliban insurgency on July 16, 2021.<sup>621</sup> The Reuters photojournalist had made his career by refusing to look away from the worst of humanity—including the Rohingya refugee crisis for which his Reuters team won a Pulitzer Prize.<sup>622</sup> In a TEDx talk, he defined his work by this commitment, explaining “My role is as a mirror, and I want to expose you to the raw truth and make you witness to it.”<sup>623</sup> Less than three months before his death, Siddiqui had indeed forced India and the world to bear witness to the unprecedented scale of sickness and death overwhelming Delhi during the Delta-variant surge. His aerial photographs of the city’s cremation grounds transfixed a world convinced they had already seen the worst of the coronavirus pandemic (See Figure 0.1 in preface). Having so recently captured the scope of grief wrought by the virus via images of corpses, the 38-year-old’s own dead body became a subject of public attention.

Siddiqui’s coverage of the 2021 spring Covid surge in India had been critical in my own work that year. Wrenching me from a state of paralyzed horror, Siddiqui’s reporting propelled me forward as a researcher and writer with purpose. Throughout the years I had committed myself to examining the dark, traumatic, and depressing corners of history for some of the same reasons Siddiqui did. Because people will look

---

<sup>621</sup> Unless noted otherwise, details regarding the morning of Siddiqui’s death come from Stephen Grey et al., “A Reuters Special Report: Reuters Photographer Died after Being Left behind, Afghan General Says,” *Reuters*, August 23, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/afghanistan-conflict-reuters-siddiqui/>.

<sup>622</sup> Sean Murphy, “In Memoriam: Danish Siddiqui (1980-2021),” July 16, 2021, <https://www.pulitzer.org/news/memoriam-danish-siddiqui-1980-2021>.

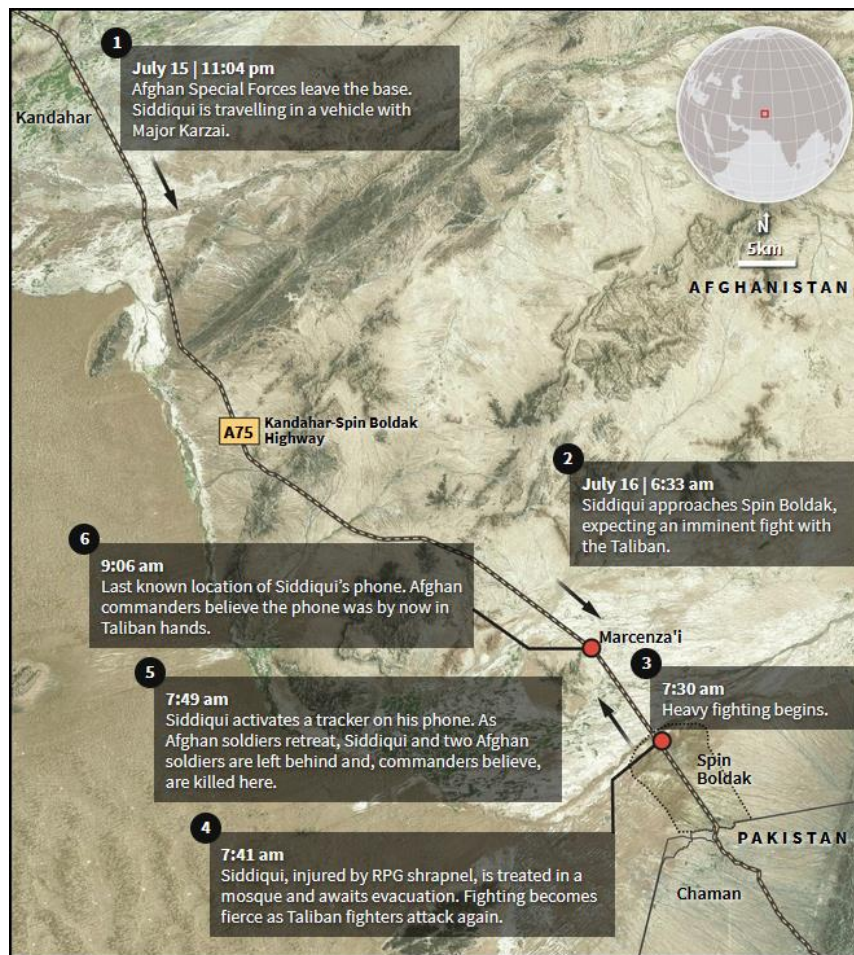
<sup>623</sup> Danish Siddiqui, *Documenting Conflict Beyond Borders* / *TEDxGateway*, 2020, [https://www.ted.com/talks/danish\\_siddiqui\\_documenting\\_conflict\\_beyond\\_borders](https://www.ted.com/talks/danish_siddiqui_documenting_conflict_beyond_borders).

away from things that make them uncomfortable. They will look away because of and in spite of its importance. And death certainly fits that bill. Matters of mortality make people so uncomfortable they often avoid grappling with minimal logistical measures to prepare their own demise or that of loved ones. No one really wants to spend their time thinking about funerals, burials and cremations, about decay and decomposition. Even more so when the death in question is violent or traumatic, or when further harm is exacted upon the postmortem corpse.

I had planned to reach out to Siddiqui. I thought I would email him one day, some undetermined time in the future. Perhaps, I imagined, when revising my monograph, I would write him for permission to use some of his photos in the book—and use that administrative necessity as an excuse to introduce myself, to fangirl over his work, and (if I was feeling truly bold) to ask if I could buy him chai next time I was in Delhi. That is impossible now. For a brief window in the immediate aftermath of Siddiqui's death, the world, India, and I followed the fate of his body from the Afghan village of Spin Boldak to a hospital Kandahar, then from Kabul to Delhi on an Air India flight, and finally, to his family's home in Delhi's Ghaffar Manzil Colony before a public funeral in the nearby Jamia Millia University cemetery in Okhla.

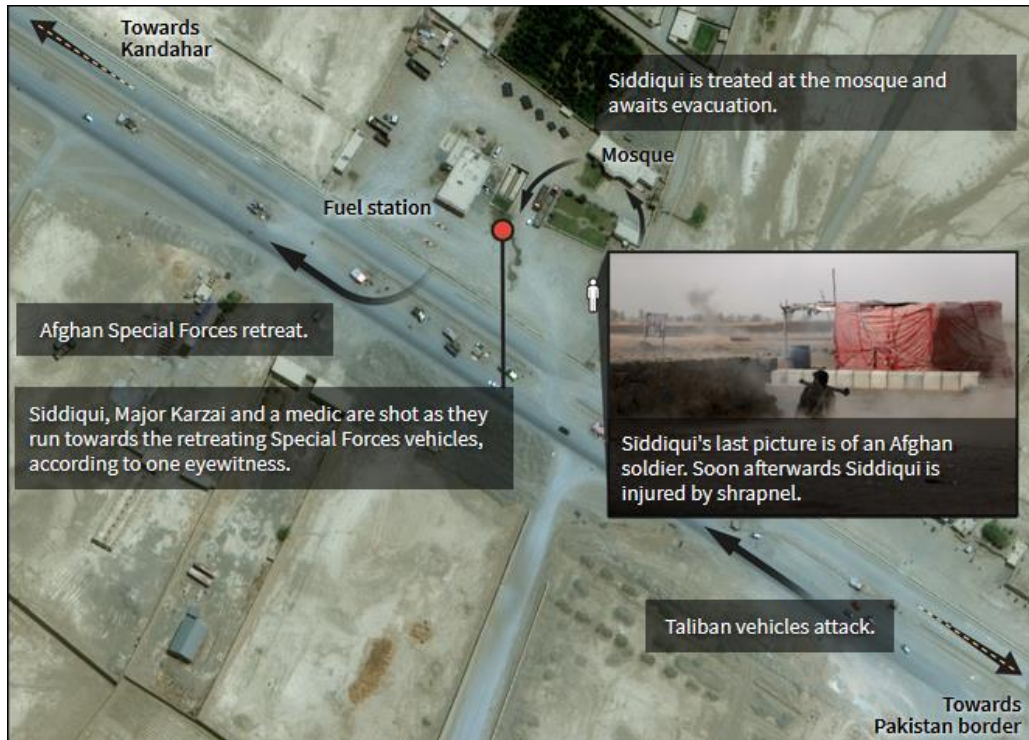
Like the combat deaths of Havildar Raje Ram and Sepoy Partab Singh in chapter one, we do not know precisely when or where Siddiqui was killed. At the time of his death, Siddiqui had become separated from the Afghani security with whom he had been embedded. His colleagues recreated the events of July 16, 2021 through a combination of interviews, military reports, communication with Siddiqui prior to his death, GPS data from his phone after his death, and photographs recovered from his

camera (Map 6.15 and Map 6.16). As a result of the Reuters investigation, we know that an injured Siddiqui sheltered in a mosque shortly before 8 am, and that his phone’s location slowly moved northwest over the next hour. After one Afghan commander reported seeing Siddiqui shot just around the corner from the mosque, Taliban representatives claimed they had “found” his body on the side of the road. Unlike Siddiqui, however, no one has tried to recreate a comparable understanding of the circumstances for Partab Singh and Raje Ram’s deaths until now.



Map 6.15: Events leading up to Siddiqui's death in local time<sup>624</sup>

<sup>624</sup> Grey et al., “A Reuters Special Report: Reuters Photographer Died after Being Left behind, Afghan General Says.”



Map 6.16: Spin Boldak based on interviews with Afghan Special Forces<sup>625</sup>

The disparity of attention has much more to do with a difference in institutional investment in an individual death. Reuters wanted to understand precisely what happened to their journalist, and so they did to the best of their ability. By contrast, a 2021 CWGC report finally acknowledges the systematic “non-commemoration” of vast numbers of non-white, non-Christian war casualties.<sup>626</sup> We saw this in practice in the comparison of Indian units like the 48<sup>th</sup> Pioneers and the 2nd Battalion Dorsetshire Regiment, the latter of whom imperial administrators proved more than capable of documenting burial locations amid in theatres of war. Let us not forget that only 76 of 2,560 WWI burials are still unidentified in the Basra cemetery

<sup>625</sup> Grey et al.

<sup>626</sup> “Report of the Special Committee to Review Historical Inequalities in Commemoration” (Maidenhead, UK: Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 2021), 9.

for the white dead (including Russian refugees and British Engineers of the Indian Labour Corps). Meanwhile, we have no idea how many Indians were buried or cremated during the same war in the adjacent Indian Forces cemetery.

Between the moment of Siddiqui's death and the International Committee of the Red Cross's (ICRC) receipt of his corpse, images of his dead body began to circulate on social media. While his colleagues tried to reach him by phone, these photos were the first confirmation of his death. Multiple sources described the bullet damage in the images as consistent with having been shot post-mortem. Others have also alleged the Taliban ran over his body with a vehicle, but that remains unsubstantiated. According to Afghan journalist Ahmad Lodin, the Taliban refused to release Siddiqui's body to the ICRC for several hours. Eventually they relented and handed over his body around 3pm that day.<sup>627</sup> Such efforts to exact corporal punishment on the dead body by the Taliban indicates an unwillingness to permit the dead to pass beyond their sphere of control.<sup>628</sup>

And as much as former imperial powers may decry any comparison with Islamic extremist governments, we have seen how the British judicial system repeatedly pursued multiple forms of postmortem punishment upon convicted criminals. In some cases, imperial postmortem punishments foreshadow acts by

---

<sup>627</sup> Ruchi Kumar, "'Ambushed by the Taliban': Kandahar Locals Recount Danish Siddiqui's Death," *Newslaundry*, July 20, 2021, <https://www.newslaundry.com/2021/07/20/ambushed-by-the-taliban-kandahar-locals-recall-danish-siddiquis-death>.

<sup>628</sup> While the Taliban denies both killing Siddiqui and exerting any violence against his dead body, it is not an isolated incident of postmortem punishment. After retaking Afghanistan later that same year, Taliban forces hanged the dead body of an accused kidnapper in Herat after the suspect died while eluding capture. "Witness Says Taliban Hanged Dead Body In Afghan City's Main Square." *NPR*, September 25, 2021, accessed from <https://www.npr.org/2021/09/25/1040671998/witness-says-taliban-hanged-dead-body-in-afghan-citys-main-square>

Taliban via the intentional physical desecration of the dead body, as we saw with the incineration of Muslim “fanatics” under the Murderous Outrages Act. In the twentieth century, backlash over funerals like that of Kanai Lal Dutta’s led to most provinces introducing new policies of postmortem retribution via the refusal to relinquish corpse custody after the end of life, which effectively expanded the punitive measures to include the families of deceased criminals and challenged the finality of death.

Before he died, Siddiqui’s last known location was approximately five and a half miles from the Pakistani border (Map 6.15).<sup>629</sup> He had sheltered in a mosque along the A75, an Afghan highway connecting the city of Kandahar with Spin Boldak. Almost exactly twelve hours after his last outgoing communication, Siddiqui’s body arrived at the main hospital in Kandahar. Around noon the next day (July 17), the Afghan army coordinated transport from Kandahar north to Kabul. Based on available sources, it remains unclear whether this military transport carrying Siddiqui’s body from Kandahar to Kabul was overland or air. Finally, on the evening of July 18, Air India Flight 244 landed at Delhi’s Indira Gandhi International Airport bearing Danish Siddiqui’s body.

Though we may not be inclined to think of a corpse as cargo, the long-distance routes they travel are often similar. The well trodden highways, railway lines, air and maritime routes were first projects of governments and industries invested in facilitating the movement of goods and military forces. When Nawab Hamid Ali

---

<sup>629</sup> By comparing the satellite image of Spin Boldak annotated by the Reuters team with Google Maps satellite images, the latitude and longitude coordinates for the mosque are approximately (31.020930, 66.386026).

Khan's made his final postmortem journey to Iraq for burial, it began with seventy-five hour train ride from Rampur that first swung north to Lahore before turning south towards the port of Karachi. In the opposite direction, Jamaluddin al-Afghani's coffin went by train from Karachi, north to Lahore, and then west to Kabul.<sup>630</sup> The decades of war plaguing Afghanistan have left it without a rail system comparable to India's, but we know Siddiqui's body travel at least part of the way via the A75. If air transport was not viable, then it likely crossed the 300 miles from Kandahar to Kabul via the notoriously hazardous A1 highway.<sup>631</sup> In each of these cases, the route of bodies took could only be as direct as the infrastructure allowed.

As an Indian citizen who died abroad, the repatriation of Siddiqui's body required coordination between multiple state actors. In this case, India's Ministry of External Affairs and the embassy in Kabul worked in concert with the Afghan military to arrange transport of the body to Kabul. Then the Afghan Ministry of Public Health enabled the body to cross state borders. Images of Siddiqui's death certificates circulating on social media indicate that while health workers took photographs of Siddiqui's body at the hospital in Kandahar, a full autopsy did not occur until the next day after arrival in Kabul.<sup>632</sup> Citing the documents received from the public health ministry, the Indian embassy in Kabul produced their own death certificate. The

---

<sup>630</sup> Kelsey J. Utne, "The Traveling Bones of Jamaluddin Al-Afghani," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, forthcoming.

<sup>631</sup> Jason Motlagh, "Highway to Hell: A Trip Down Afghanistan's Deadliest Road," *Rolling Stone*, January 22, 2021, <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/afghanistan-war-taliban-kabul-kandahar-road-1112819/>.

<sup>632</sup> Sidhant Sibal, "Danish Siddiqui's Mortal Remains to Reach India Shortly on Air India Plane. He Died of 'Multiple Gun Shot Wounds'." <https://t.co/UN8tnwhlAR>, "Tweet, @sidhant, July 18, 2021, <https://twitter.com/sidhant/status/1416722830129975301>.

number for this second death certificate issued by the embassy, “CONS/KBL/01/2021” suggests that Siddiqui’s death was the first one of the calendar year in which the Indian embassy in Kabul was involved.

The constraints of state borders and administrative systems uniquely impact the movement of human remains across international borders. In particular, the performance of public health regulations overrides commemorative concerns. Indian Shi’i Muslims had to contend with seasonal procedures (from first Ottoman and then British mandate Iraq), that stipulated the allowable condition of an importable body. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the exhumation and export of a dead body from Indian port cities required documented clearance from local medical officials at the place of prior burial, and coffins sealed with tin or lead. Increasingly, a passport verifying identity and death certificate articulating the cause of death became requisite. These bureaucratic innovations codified at least some aspects of commemorative possibilities as within the sphere of public health, where they remain to this day. We see the legacies of these processes at work in photographs of Siddiqui’s coffin, which capture a taped notice only somewhat obscured by rope, but legible nonetheless:

It is certified this coffin contains mortal remains of late Shri AHMAD DANISH SIDDIQUI, holder of Indian Passport No. Z...263 (Lost and Misplaced) ... EC No. X297708 issued on 18.07.2021 and it has been nailed and sealed in the presence of the undersigned....<sup>633</sup>

---

<sup>633</sup> Gloria Methri, “Mortal Remains of Danish Siddiqui Arrive in Delhi; to Be Buried at Jamia Varsity Graveyard,” *Republic World*, accessed January 21, 2022, <https://www.republicworld.com/india-news/general-news/mortal-remains-of-danish-siddiqui-arrive-in-delhi-to-be-buried-at-jamia-varsity-graveyard.html>.

Up until this point, the history of the South Asian dead has allowed us to locate Siddiqui's death as a combat casualty, as a border-crossing body, as public health issue, and a bureaucratic matter. Upon its arrival in Delhi, Siddiqui's corpse becomes a part of the city's commemorative landscape, embedding him within a certain lineage of Muslim mourning and memory in the city.

\*\*\*

No commemorative marker –be it large or small– exists in a vacuum. Every new gravestone and plaque becomes part of a pre-existing commemorative landscape, whether that fact is acknowledged or not. A new grave becomes part of the larger cemetery, and enters into a relationship to all the graves already there. That cemetery exists as part of a network of disposal grounds within the larger neighborhood, municipality, district, state or province, and country, linked by roads, governance, affiliations, and shared purposes.

My professional experience as a public historian strongly influenced the decision to examine modern South Asian history (and specifically the history of the South Asian dead) through the lens of critical heritage studies. Every day I saw how public conceptions of the past were more tightly bound to individual encounters with commemorative representations than academic literature. They particularized heritage projects, large or small, based on their own experiences. For example, visitors to the Salem Maritime National Historic Site reliably queried where Elias Haskett Derby, maritime merchant and American's first millionaire, was buried at the conclusion of the tour of his restored Georgian home. Upon learning that no one knows where the merchant baron lay buried (though it was likely somewhere on the family farm, which

has long since been redeveloped as a commercial zone), visitors personalized this information. They recalled graves in their own family lost to time, news stories they read about burial grounds under parking lots, their grandfather's memory of dislodged grave markers during the second world war, names worn away and forgotten on abandoned tombstones in a local field. Rarely did they relate this information to anything academic in nature. And yet, what Michel-Rolph Trouillot wrote over two decades ago remains true: "the fact that history is also produced outside of academia has largely been ignored in theories of history."<sup>634</sup>

In its attentiveness to the materiality of South Asian corpse disposal in the late colonial period, this book allows us to contextualize individual deaths within larger histories of mourning, medicine, and memorialization. By bringing critical heritage studies to bear on histories of the South Asian dead, I have argued that in order to understand the late colonial period, we must develop a fuller grasp of the South Asian commemorative landscape. Throughout each chapter, I have emphasized our need to be more critical of histories that define the contours of memorialization in South Asia by the white dead, the gendered dead, and violent mass casualty events. In order to do so, we must work against the archival logics that relegate the everyday India dead as tedious background noise without a bureaucratic center.

In the colonial archives, the Indian dead were most often a logistical nuisance to be dealt with. From inconvenient burial locations in Mesopotamia during World War I to municipal oversight of cemeteries and cremation grounds, these were

---

<sup>634</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1995), 21.

obligations only reluctantly and minimally fulfilled. The care of the Indian dead concerned colonial bureaucrats only in as much as absolutely necessary for the colonial project. As we saw in the procedural records of the colonial prison system, the deaths of incarcerated individuals threatened public health and safety. The numerical tallies of the infectious disease dead served as metrics for the success or failure of the paternalist state, while the politically contentious prison dead (from execution deaths to fatal hunger strikes) haunted officials with an incendiary potential of public unrest. While the criminal justice system at the metropole faced seemingly similar dilemmas, colonial administrators navigated their managerial priorities by expansive and layered states of exception applicable only the colonial criminal. The example of Sajjan Singh illustrates how the Indian criminal corpse was simultaneously excepted from standard procedures due to and in spite of applicable legal rulings at the time.

The diversity of commemorative praxis among South Asian communities challenged colonial epistemologies determined to delineate boundaries, both physical and conceptual, around every aspect of the colonial experience. As we saw in municipal acts across the United Provinces, colonial regulations for burial and cremation grounds consistently presumed that there already was a semi-official consensus of extant all corpse disposal sites, which in turn had distinct edges. The enactment of these regulations consequently relied on private property ownership rather than land informally held in community trust. And yet, the dead persisted in soil without formal recognition by the state, or found final rest along river bank areas supposedly banned from cremation or water burials. The failure of officials to

understand how these sites operated within physical space, mirrored the ways in which corpse disposal traditions were consigned to ethnographic curiosities rather than practical concerns. Whether within the boundaries of the colony or abroad, every divergent corpse disposal practice undermined the colonial knowledge project.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Archival Sources: India

#### *Delhi State Archives (DSA), New Delhi, India*

Chief Commissioner's Office (CC)

Confidential

Home

Education

Military

Deputy Commissioner's Office (DC)

#### *National Archives of India (NAI)*

Baghdad Residency

Commonwealth Relations Department

Overseas

Controller Railway Account

Defence Department

DGIMS

Education, Health, and Land Department (EHL)

Ecclesiastical

General

Health

Lands

Museums

Overseas

Health

Foreign & Political Department

External

Foreign & Political

Frontier

General

Honours

Internal

Near East

Home Department

Home

Jails

Judicial

Police

Political

Public

Legislative Department

Princely States

Bhopal

Bundelkhand

Jaipur

Mysore  
Rajputana  
Rewakantha

***Uttar Pradesh State Archives in Lucknow (UPSA)***

Miscellaneous Department  
Municipal Department  
Political Department  
Public Works Department  
Revenue Department

***Uttar Pradesh Regional State Archives in Varanasi (UPRSA)***

Judicial Department  
Local Self-Government Department  
Municipal Department  
Public Works Department  
Revenue Department

**Archival Sources: United Kingdom**

***British Library***

Public and Judicial Departmental Papers (IOR/L/PJ/6-7 series)  
Mesopotamian Campaign (IOR/L/MIL/17/15/65-138 series)  
Proceedings (IOR/P series)  
Gwalior, Rampur and Benares Agency (IOR/R/2 series)  
Jail Manuals (IOR/V/27/171 series)

***Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC)***

Prehistory of the Commission (1/1/1 series)  
Directorate Of Graves Registration And Enquiries (1/1/1/34 series)  
Care of Graves and Cemeteries of British and Empire War Casualties (1/1/7 series)  
Treatment of Graves and Cemeteries: Policy and General Considerations (1/1/5 series)  
Memorials Erected By The Commission (1/1/9 series)  
Annual Reports (2/1/ADD series)  
Commission Meeting Minute Files (2/2/1 series)  
Finance Committee (4/2 series)  
Cemetery and Memorials design and construction (7/3 series)  
Cemetery Files (7/4 series)  
Casualty Records (8/1 series)  
Library Photographic Print Collection (9/2/2 series)

***UK National Archives***

Colonial Office: Fiji, Original Correspondence (CO 83 series)  
Colonial Office: British Honduras, Original Correspondence (CO 123 series)  
Colonial Office: Middle East, Original Correspondence (CO 732 series)  
Colonial Office: Palestine, Original Correspondence (CO 733 series)

### Published Primary Sources

- Administration Report of the Bombay Jail Department Amritsar District, 1947.* Punjab District Gazetteers. Chandigarh: Controller of Printing and Stationary, 1947.
- Annual Report on the Administration of the Jails of the Madras Presidency*
- Annual Report on the Jails of the Central Provinces*
- Annual Report on the Prison Administration in the United Provinces*
- Assam Jail Manual.* Shillong: Assam Government Press, 1934.
- Bengal Jail Code.* Alipore: Bengal Government Press, 1937.
- Bingley, A. H. *History, Caste & Culture of Jāts and Gūjars.* Simla: Government Central Print. Office, 1899.
- . *Sikhs.* Simla: Government Central Print. Office, 1899.
- Blunt, Edward Arthur Henry. *List of Inscriptions on Christian Tombs and Tablets of Historical Interest in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh.* Allahabad, 1911.
- . *United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. Pt. II, Imperial Tables.* Vol. XV. Census of India, 1911. Allahabad: Superintendent, Government Press, 1912.
- Bombay Jail Manual In The Bombay Presidency Part I.* Bombay: Government Central Press, 1911.
- Brown, G.S.T. Orde, *Report upon the Labour in the Tanganyika Territory for the year 1925,* H.M. Stationery Office, 1926.
- Cave-Browne, J. *Indian Infanticide: Its Origin, Progress, and Suppression.* London: W. H. Allen, 1857.
- Cole, Henry Hardy. *Preservation of National Monuments: Report of the Curator of Ancient Monuments in India.* 3 vols. Simla: Government Central Branch Press, 1882-1885.
- . *Preservation of National Monuments, India (Delhi),* 1884.
- Cracknall, W.B. "Civil Case No. 470 of 1886, L. Matthews, Binti Masood and Yussonji Haridas, on Behalf of the Bhatia Mahajan, V. Mancherji Pestonji, Shapoorji Pestonji, Hormusji Nowroji, Dhanjibhai Dadabhai and Dorabji Dinshaw." In *Zanzibar Protectorate Law Reports,* edited by William Murison and S.S. Abrahams, Vol. I. 1887. Reprint, London: Waterlow and Sons, Ltd, 1919.
- Crofton, Olive S. *List Of Inscriptions On Tombs Or Monuments In The Central Provinces And Berar.* Nagpur: Government Printing, 1932.
- . *List Of Inscriptions On Tombs Or Monuments In Rajputana & Central India.* Simla: Government of India Press, 1934.
- Crooke, William. *Tribes And Castes Of The North-Western Provinces.* 4 vols. 1896. Reprint, Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1999.
- Delhi District With Maps: 1912.* Vol. V Part A. Punjab District Gazetteers. Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1913.

- Delhi District, Statistical Tables: 1904.* Vol. V Part B. Punjab District Gazetteers. Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1904.
- Earl Of Halsbury. *The Laws of England.* Vol. III. London: Butterworth & Co., 1908.
- Eminent Mussalmans.* Madras: G. A. Natesan, 1926.
- Fuhrer, A. *List of Christian Tombs and Monuments of Archæological Or Historical Interest: And Their Inscriptions in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh.* Allahabad: Archaeological Surveyor, 1896.
- Gait, E.A. *India: Part 1. Report.* Vol. 1. Census of India 1911. Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1913.
- Gazetteer of the Rampur State.* Allahabad: Government Press, United Provinces, 1911.
- Gille, Albert. *A Record of the Inscriptions at the Catholic Church at Patna, Bihar and Orissa.* Patna: Superintendent, Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1917.
- Hathaway, Charles. *The Jail Manual for the Use of District Officers in the Punjab.* Lahore: Chronicle Press, 1858.
- Imperial Gazetteer Of India.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909.
- Imperial Gazetteer Of India.* Provincial Series. Calcutta: Superintendent Of Government Printing, 1908-1909.
- Jail Manual of the Central Provinces & Berar.* Nagpur: Government Press, 1946.
- Kaul, Pandit Harikishan. *Punjab. Part 1: Report.* Vol. XIV. Census of India, 1911. Lahore: Superintendent Government Printing, 1912.
- Landon, Perceval. *1857: In Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Indian Mutiny.* London: W.H. Smith & Son, 1907.
- List of European Tombs in the Cemeteries Attached to the Various Churches in the Nilgiri District.* Madras, 1905.
- List of European Tombs in the Tanjore District.* Madras: Superintendent Government Press, 1914.
- MacMunn, George Fletcher, and A. C Lovett. *The Armies of India.* London: A. and C. Black, 1911.
- Mead, P.J., and G. Laird MacGregor. *Bombay: Part 1. Report.* Vol. XV. Census of India, 1911. Bombay: Government Central Press, 1912.
- Meek, Reverend Martin. *The Martyr of Allahabad: Memorials of Ensign Arthur Marcus Hill Cheek, of the Sixth Native Bengal Infantry, Murdered by the Sepoys at Allahabad.* London: James Nisbet & Co, 1858.
- Menant, Delphine. *Les Parsis, Histoire Des Communautés Zoroastrinennes de l'Inde.* Annales Du Musée Guimet. Bibliothèque d'études. Paris: E. Leroux, 1898.
- Middleton, L., and S. M. Jacob. *Punjab and Delhi. Part 1: Report.* Vol. XV. Census of India, 1921. Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1923.
- Modi, Jivanji Jamshedji. ““On the Funeral Ceremonies of the Parsees, Their Origin and Explanation.”” *Journal of Anthropological Society of Bombay* II, no. 7 (September 1891): 405–40.
- Multan District, 1923-24, Part A.* Vol. VII. Punjab District Gazetteers. Lahore: Superintendent Government Printing, 1926.
- Owen, William. *Memorials of Christian Martyrs: And Other Sufferers for the Truth in the Indian Rebellion.* London: Simkin, Marshall, & Co, 1859.

- Patell, Bomanjee Byramjee. "Notes on the Towers of Silence in India." *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay* II, no. 1 (June 1889): 55–64.
- Report of the Committee on Prison-Discipline to the Governor General of India.* Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1838.
- Report of the Expert Committee on Jail Reforms.* Allahabad: Superintendent, Printing and Stationery, 1938.
- Report of the Indian Jails Committee, 1919-20.* London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1921.
- Report on the Census of British India Taken on the 17th February 1881.* Vol. I. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1883.
- Report of the Indian National Congress Forty-first session Gauhati (Assam) 1926.*
- Ruling Princes, Chiefs and Leading Personages in the Western India States Agency.* Rajkot: Western India States Agency Press, 1928.
- Statistical Tables Appended to the Gazetteer of the Delhi District, 1883-4.* Lahore: Arya Press, n.d.
- Theobald, William. *The Legislative Acts of the Governor General of India in Council from 1834 to the End of 1867.* Vol. V. Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Company, 1868.
- Tugwell, W. B. P. *History Of The Bombay Pioneers.* London: Sidney Press Limited, 1938.
- Turner, A.C. *United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. Part I: Report.* Vol. XVIII. Census Of India, 1931. Allahabad: Superintendent, Printing and Stationery, 1933.
- Walsh, Reverend J. Johnston. *A Memorial of the Futtehghurh Mission and Her Martyred Missionaries: With Some Remarks on the Mutiny in India.* Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1858.
- Wiehe, C.G. *Journal of a Tour of Inspection of the Principal Jails in India Made by the Inspector General of Prisons, Bombay Presidency, in December 1862 and January and February 1863.* Bombay: Education Society's Press, 1865.
- Wilkinson, E. "Notes on the Prevalence of Tuberculosis in India." *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine* 7, no. Section of Epidemiology and State Medicine (May 1914): 195–226.
- Williams, William Plumbridge, ed. *The Acts of the Legislative Council of India, Relating to the Madras Presidency, from 1848 to 1855: With an Abstract of Each Section, and an ... Index.* Madras: Church of Scotland Mission Press, 1856.

### Secondary Works

- Abbas, Nazar. "Probe into Rampur's Graveyard's Desecration." *Times of India*, August 21, 2016. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bareilly/Probe-into-Rampur-graveyards-desecration/articleshow/53789442.cms>.
- Abid, S. K. "Imam Ali Shrine, Institution and Cultural Monument: The Implications of Cultural Significance and Its Impact on Local Conservation Management," 153:87–98. A Coruña, Spain, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.2495/STR150081>.
- Abraham, Santhosh. "Constructing the 'Extraordinary Criminals': Mappila Muslims and Legal Encounters in Early British Colonial Malabar." *Journal of World History* 25, no. 2/3 (June 2014): 373–95.

- Adhikari, Somak. “3 Alleged COVID Patients Being Taken To Hospital In Garbage Truck. Former Andhra CM Is Appalled.” *India Times*, August 3, 2020. <https://www.indiatimes.com/news/india/3-alleged-covid-19-patients-being-taken-to-hospital-in-garbage-truck-former-andhra-cm-is-appalled-519444.html>.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford University Press, 1998.
- Ahirwal, Manika Raikwar. “What It Took To Cremate My Father In Delhi.” News. NDTV.com, May 10, 2021. <https://www.ndtv.com/blog/blog-what-it-took-to-cremate-my-father-in-delhi-2438818>.
- Alam, Shahnawaz. “90 Bodies in One Day, Funerals at Parking Lot of Gurgaon Crematorium | Gurgaon News.” *Times of India*, April 27, 2021. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/gurgaon/90-bodies-in-one-day-funerals-at-parking-lot-of-gurgaon-crematorium/articleshow/82265746.cms>.
- Amin, Shahid. “Gandhi as Mahatma.” In *Selected Subaltern Studies*, edited by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 288–348. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Amiya K Samanta, ed. *Terrorism in Bengal: A Collection of Documents on Terrorist Activities from 1905 to 1939*. Vol. 1. Calcutta: Government of West Bengal, 1995.
- Anagol, Padma. “The Emergence of the Female Criminal in India: Infanticide and Survival under the Raj.” *History Workshop Journal*, no. 53 (2002): 73–93.
- Anantanand Rambachan. “The Hindu Way of Death.” In *Handbook of Death & Dying*, edited by Clifton D. Bryant and Dennis L. Peck, 640–48. SAGE Publications, 2003.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2006.
- Anstett, Élisabeth. *A Companion to the Anthropology of Death*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2018.
- Ariès, Philippe. *Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*. Translated by Patricia M. Ranum. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974.
- Arnold, David. “Deathscapes: India in an Age of Romanticism and Empire, 1800–1856.” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 26, no. 4 (December 4, 2004): 339–53.
- . “The Colonial Prison: Power, Knowledge and Penology in Nineteenth Century India.” In *Subaltern Studies VIII: Essays in Honour of Ranajit Guha*, edited by David Arnold and David Hardiman, 148–84. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Ashish K. Jha. “There’s an Old Saying in Global Health You Can Ignore, Fail to Test for, or Undercount Whatever Disease You Want But You Can’t Ignore the Dead In India, the Dead Are Telling Us the Disease Is Much Worse than the Official Statistics And We Have to Listen Fin.” Tweet. *Twitter*, May 9, 2021. <https://twitter.com/ashishkjha/status/1391238140166279169>.

- Aslan, Rose S. "From Body to Shrine: The Construction of Sacred Space at the Grave of 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib In Najaf." Ph.D. dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2014.
- Ateş, Sabri. "Bones of Contention: Corpse Traffic and Ottoman-Iranian Rivalry in Nineteenth-Century Iraq." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no. 3 (December 1, 2010): 512–32.
- "Attaining Salvation: South Delhi Civic Body Approves Usage of Cow-Dung Cakes For Cremation," December 26, 2020.  
<https://www.india.com/news/india/attaining-moksha-south-delhi-civic-body-approves-usage-of-cow-dung-cakes-for-cremation-4291432/>.
- Banerjee, Tamaghna. "Kolkata: Body Kept for 17 Hours in Flat, 12 Hours in Morgue during Crematorium Hunt." *Times of India*, May 10, 2021.  
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/body-kept-for-17-hrs-in-flat-12-hrs-in-morgue-during-crematorium-hunt/articleshow/82506958.cms>.
- Bates, Robert, Avner Greif, and Smita Singh. "Organizing Violence." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2002.
- Bayly, C. A. "From Ritual to Ceremony: Death Ritual and Society in Hindu North India since 1600." In *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death*, edited by Joachim Whaley, 154–86. London: Europa, 1981.
- . "The Pre-History of 'Communalism'? Religious Conflict in India, 1700–1860." *Modern Asian Studies* 19, no. 02 (1985).
- Bellman, Eric. "Covid-19 Was Consuming India, Until Nearly Everyone Started Wearing Masks." *Wall Street Journal*, December 30, 2020.  
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-was-consuming-india-until-nearly-everyone-started-wearing-masks-11609329603>.
- Bender, Jill C. *The 1857 Indian Uprising and the British Empire*. Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Benton, Lauren A. *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400-1900*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Berry, Daina Ramey. *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2017.
- Blunt, Alison. "Embodying War: British Women and Domestic Defilement in the Indian 'Mutiny', 1857-8." *Journal of Historical Geography* 26, no. 3 (2000): 403–28.
- Blunt, E. A. H. *United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. Pt. II, Imperial Tables*. Vol. XV. Census of India, 1911. Allahabad: Superintendent, Government Press, 1912.
- Hindu. "Body of COVID-19 Victim Carried to Crematorium in Garbage Vehicle; H.P. CM Orders Probe." April 29, 2021.  
<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/body-of-covid-19-victim-carried-to-crematorium-in-garbage-vehicle-hp-cm-orders-probe/article34440411.ece>.
- Tribune India. "Body of COVID-19 Victim Carried to Crematorium on Garbage Cart in Bihar, Probe Ordered," May 17, 2021.  
<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/body-of-covid-19-victim-carried-to-crematorium-on-garbage-cart-in-bihar-probe-ordered-254130>.

- Boyce, Mary. "Corpse." In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 279–86, 2011.  
<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/corpse-disposal-of-in-zoroastrianism>.
- . *Zoroastrians, Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. Library of Religious Beliefs and Practices. London ; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.
- Broughton, Trev Lynn. "The Bengal Obituary: Reading and Writing Calcutta Graves in the Mid Nineteenth Century." *Journal of Victorian Culture* 15, no. 1 (April 2010): 39–59.
- Brown, Rebecca M. "Inscribing Colonial Monumentality: A Case Study of the 1763 Patna Massacre Memorial." *Journal of Asian Studies* 65, no. 1 (2006): 91–113.
- . "The Cemeteries And The Suburbs: Patna's Challenges to the Colonial City in South Asia." *Journal of Urban History* 29, no. 2 (January 2003): 151–72.
- Brown, Vincent. *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery*. Harvard University Press, 2008.
- Buettner, Elizabeth. "Cemeteries, Public Memory and Raj Nostalgia in Postcolonial Britain and India." *History and Memory* 18, no. 1 (2006).
- . "Problematic Spaces, Problematic Races: Defining 'Europeans' in Late Colonial India." *Women's History Review* 9, no. 2 (June 1, 2000): 277–98.
- Burton, Antoinette M. *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994.
- Butalia, Urvashi. *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000.
- Buxton, Hilary. "Disabled Empire: Race, Rehabilitation, and the Politics of Healing Non-White Colonial Soldiers, 1914-1940." Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University - School of Graduate Studies, 2018.
- Chakravarty, Gautam. *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Chatterjee, Partha. *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power*. Princeton University Press, 2012.
- . *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton University Press, 1993.
- . "The Nationalist Resolution to the Women's Question." In *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, edited by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid. New Delhi: Zubaan, 2010.
- Chatterjee, Patralekha. "Is India Missing COVID-19 Deaths?" *Lancet* 396, no. 10252 (September 5, 2020): 657.
- Chattha, Ilyas. *Partition and Locality: Violence, Migration, and Development in Gujranwala and Sialkot, 1947-1961*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Chaudhary, Zahid R. *Afterimage of Empire: Photography in Nineteenth-Century India*. University of Minnesota Press, 2012.
- Choksy, Jamsheed K. "Iranians and Indians on the Shores of Serendib (Sri Lanka)." edited by John R. Hinnells and Alan Williams, 181–210. Routledge, 2007.
- Cohn, Bernard S. *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*. Princeton University Press, 1996.

- Cole, Juan R. I. “‘Indian Money’ and the Shi’i Shrine Cities of Iraq, 1786-1850.” *Middle Eastern Studies* 22, no. 4 (1986): 461–80.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4283138>.
- Condos, Mark. “‘Fanaticism’ and the Politics of Resistance along the North-West Frontier of British India.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58, no. 3 (2016): 717–45.
- . “Licence to Kill: The Murderous Outrages Act and the Rule of Law in Colonial India, 1867–1925.” *Modern Asian Studies* 50, no. 2 (March 2016): 479–517.
- Conway, Heather. “Williams v Williams (1882): Succession Law Rules and the Fate of the Dead.” In *Landmark Cases in Succession Law*, edited by Brian Sloan, 249–64. New York: Oxford, 2019.
- Crane, David. *Empires of the Dead: How One Man’s Vision Led to the Creation of WWI’s War Graves*. London: William Collins, 2013.
- Cunningham, Erin, and Dalton Bennett. “Coronavirus Burial Pits in Iran so Vast That They’re Visible from Space.” *Washington Post*, March 12, 2020.  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/world/iran-coronavirus-outbreak-graves/>.
- CWGC. “Sepoy Partab Singh | War Casualty Details.” Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Accessed April 8, 2021. <https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/1680588/partab-singh/>.
- Dainik Bhaskar. “कोरोना देश में: 25 दिन में रोज जान गंवाने वाले मरीजों की संख्या 1 हजार से 4 हजार हुई; 24 घंटे में 4.1 लाख नए संक्रमित मिले, रिकॉर्ड 4191 मौतें,” May 7, 2021, sec. National.  
<https://www.bhaskar.com/national/news/coronavirus-outbreak-india-cases-new-corona-strain-vaccination-live-updates-07-may-2021-128471785.html>.
- Dainik Bhaskar. “श्मशान और कब्रिस्तान में अब तक 300 से अधिक डेडबॉडी पहुंची, सरकारी रिकार्ड में सिर्फ 68 मौतें,” May 10, 2020.  
<https://epaper.bhaskar.com/detail/359253/51808495553/cph/10052020/194/image>.
- Dalrymple, William. *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty : Delhi, 1857*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007.
- DamoT. “@newscomauHQ Cut the Crap BS Hype. India Isn’t ‘Ravaged’. Per Capita It Has Less than What Happened in Parts of Europe, US and the UK.” Tweet. @Damo\_\_T, May 11, 2021.  
[https://twitter.com/Damo\\_\\_T/status/1392002175950233601](https://twitter.com/Damo__T/status/1392002175950233601).
- Dan Chesler. “@steve\_hanke Are You Familiar with <https://t.co/Uub7pkC8oA>. It Shows India Is Currently Ranked 110th in Deaths per Capita (116/M) from Covid. The US Meanwhile Is Ranked 18th at 1,786/M. Looks like India Has a Long Ways to Go Just to Catch up to the US.” Tweet. @DanChesler, May 6, 2021. <https://twitter.com/DanChesler/status/1390455956580995072>.
- David. “@mickey\_blue\_66 @JamesMelville Suits Their Narrative, to Put It in Perspective, Sad Though It Is:- COVID DEATHS: United States: 174.02 per 100,000 People. United Kingdom: 190.98 per 100,000 People India: 13.87 per 100,000 People As of 4/23/21/ <https://t.co/89NqcWVvoD>.” Tweet.

- @David71187149, April 24, 2021.  
<https://twitter.com/David71187149/status/1386019551997947907>.
- Davies, Douglas J. *Brief History of Death*. Blackwell, 2005.
- Indian Express. “Delhi: Cremation Ground Makes Space for 20 Pyres in Parking Lot,” April 25, 2021. <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/delhi-cremation-ground-makes-space-for-20-pyres-in-parking-lot-7287690/>.
- “Delhi Fights Corona.” Accessed May 10, 2020. <https://delhifightscorona.in/>.
- Delhi Minorities Commission. “Problems and Status of Muslim Graveyards in Delhi.” Government of NCT Delhi, 2018.
- Dilshad, Mohd. “Woman’s Body Ferried in Garbage Truck to Crematorium in UP’s Shamli.” *Times of India*, May 10, 2021.  
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/meerut/womans-body-ferried-in-garbage-truck-to-crematorium-in-shamli/articleshow/82505407.cms>.
- Doniger, Wendy. *The Hindus: An Alternative History*. New York: Penguin, 2010.
- Dwarakanath, Nagarjun. “‘House Full’: As Bodies Pile up, out of Space Crematorium Closes Facility in Bengaluru.” *India Today*. May 3, 2021.  
<https://www.indiatoday.in/coronavirus-outbreak/story/house-full-covid-bodies-pile-up-out-of-space-crematorium-closes-facility-bengaluru-chamrajpet-1798368-2021-05-03>.
- Dwary, Anurag. “Garbage Van Ferries Covid Patients’ Bodies To Chhattisgarh Crematorium.” NDTV, April 14, 2021. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/garbage-van-ferries-covid-patients-bodies-to-chhattisgarh-crematorium-2413842>.
- Ephrat, Daphna, Ethel Sara Wolper, and Paulo G. Pinto, eds. *Saintly Spheres and Islamic Landscapes: Emplacements of Spiritual Power across Time and Place*. Brill, 2020.
- “Excess Deaths Associated with COVID-19,” September 9, 2020.  
[https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid19/excess\\_deaths.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid19/excess_deaths.htm).
- Falah, Shubber M. “The Shrine That Consumed Its Town: The Role of Religion and Politics in Reshaping the Iraqi City of Najaf.” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 2018.
- Faust, Drew Gilpin. *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008.
- Feuer, Alan, and Andrea Salcedo. “New York City Deploys 45 Mobile Morgues as Virus Strains Funeral Homes.” *New York Times*, April 2, 2020.
- Figueira, Dorothy. “Die Flambierte Frau: Sati in European Culture.” In *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse: The Burning of Wives in India*, edited by John Stratton Hawley, 55–71. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Flood, Gavin, ed. *The Oxford History of Hinduism: Hindu Practice*. The Oxford History of Hinduism. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Freitag, Sandria B. *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India*. University of California Press, 1989.
- Games, Alison. *Inventing the English Massacre: Amboyna in History and Memory*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

- Ghosh, Durba. "Decoding the Nameless: Gender, Subjectivity, and Historical Methodologies in Reading the Archives in Colonial India." In *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840*, edited by Kathleen Wilson, 297–316. Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- . *Gentlemanly Terrorists: Political Violence and the Colonial State in India, 1919-1947*. Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Gibson, Edwin, and G. Kingsley Ward. *Courage Remembered: The Story Behind the Construction and Maintenance of the Commonwealth's Military Cemeteries and Memorials of the Wars of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945*. H.M. Stationery Office, 1995.
- Gilet Jayne. "Is Anyone Else Listening to the News Channels Handwringing over India Covid Deaths and Remembering the UK Death Rate per Population Is 10x Higher than India. That's Propaganda Folks." Tweet. @JayneEdwards2, May 1, 2021.  
<https://twitter.com/JayneEdwards2/status/1388316728699068417>.
- Giuffrida, Angela, and Lorenzo Tondo. "'A Generation Has Died': Italian Province Struggles to Bury Its Coronavirus Dead." *Guardian*, March 19, 2020, sec. World news.
- Goswami, Manu. "'Englishness' on the Imperial Circuit: Mutiny Tours in Colonial South Asia." *Journal of Historical Sociology* 9, no. 1 (March 1, 1996): 54–84.
- Gould, William. *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India*. Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Greenberg, Jonathan Daniel. "Generations of Memory: Remembering Partition in India/Pakistan and Israel/Palestine." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, no. 1 (2005): 89–110.
- Grey, Daniel J.R. "Gender, Religion, and Infanticide in Colonial India, 1870—1906." *Victorian Review* 37, no. 2 (2011): 107–20.
- Grey, Stephen, Charlotte Greenfield, Devjyot Ghoshal, Alasdair Pal, and Reade Levinson. "A Reuters Special Report: Reuters Photographer Died after Being Left behind, Afghan General Says." *Reuters*, August 23, 2021.  
<https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/afghanistan-conflict-reuters-siddiqui/>.
- Gupta, Charu. "Anxious Hindu Masculinities in Colonial North India: 'Shuddhi' and 'Sangathan' Movements." *CrossCurrents* 61, no. 4 (2011): 441–54.
- Haleem, M.A.S. Abdel, trans. *The Qur'an: English Translation & Arabic Text*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Halevi, Leor. *Muhammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society*. Columbia University Press, 2007.
- Hall, Catherine. *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867*. University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- Hardiman, David. "The Influenza Epidemic of 1918 and the Adivasis of Western India." *Social History of Medicine* 25, no. 3 (August 2012): 644–64.
- Commonwealth War Graves Commission. "Havildar Raje Ram | War Casualty Details." Accessed January 6, 2021. <https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/1683632/raje-ram/>.

- Hawley, John Stratton, ed. *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse: The Burning of Wives in India*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Heathorn, Stephen J. "Angel of Empire: The Cawnpore Memorial Well as a British Site of Imperial Remembrance." *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 8, no. 3 (2008).
- Helge Brunborg and Ewa Tabeau. "Demography of Conflict and Violence: An Emerging Field." *European Journal of Population / Revue Européenne de Démographie* 21, no. 2/3 (June 2005): 131–44.
- Hinnells, John R. "Parsi Communities I. Early History." In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2008. <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/parsi-communities-i-early-history>.  
———. *The Zoroastrian Diaspora: Religion and Migration*. OUP Oxford, 2005.
- Hughes-Wilson, John. *A History Of The First World War In 100 Objects: In Association with the Imperial War Museum*. London, UK: Cassell Illustrated, 2014.
- Hull, Matthew S. *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan*. University of California Press, 2012.
- Illaiyah, Kancha. *Why I Am Not a Hindu*. 2nd UK ed. edition. Calcuttta: Samya, 2002.
- Guardian. "India's Covid Crisis: Delhi Crematoriums Forced to Build Makeshift Pyres," April 28, 2021, sec. World news.  
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/28/india-covid-funeral-pyres-delhi-crematoriums-space>.
- Jain, Jangi Lal. *Commentaries on the Punjab Municipal Act, 1911 (Punjab Act No. III of 1911) as Amended up-to-Date: With Exhaustive and up-to-Date Case Law Rules and Notifications*. Chandigarh: Jain Law Agency, 1968.
- Jha, Deepak Kumar. "Kafan Demand Rises by 30 Fold." *Pioneer*, May 17, 2021.  
<https://www.dailypioneer.com/2021/page1/kafan-demand-rises-by-30-fold.html>.
- Johari, Aarefa, and Vijayta Lalwani. "'Bodies after Bodies Are Coming': Death and Devastation in Delhi." *Scroll.In*. April 29, 2021.  
<https://scroll.in/article/993561/bodies-after-bodies-are-coming-death-and-devastation-in-delhi>.
- Johnson, W. J. "Burial." In *A Dictionary of Hinduism*, 152. Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Jones, Kenneth W. *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab*. University of California Press, 1976.
- Jupp, P. *From Dust to Ashes: Cremation and the British Way of Death*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2006.
- Kabir, Ananya Jahanara. *Partition's Post-Amnesias: 1947, 1971 and Modern South Asia*, 2013.
- Ashval. "Kabristan Mai Cafe-'Lucky Restaurant in Ahmedabad,'" December 21, 2017. <https://ashaval.com/lucky-restaurant-ahmedabad-12189/>.
- Kashyap, Sunil. "उत्तर प्रदेश के हर गांव में कोरोना का कहर : घर-घर मौत, हर घर मातम." *Caravan*, May 8, 2021. <https://hindi.caravanmagazine.in/crime/up-rural-areas-facing-covid-crisis>.

- Kaufman, Sharon R. "Dying and Death." In *Encyclopedia of Medical Anthropology*, edited by Carol R. Ember and Melvin Ember, 244–52. Boston, MA: Springer, 2004.
- Kaur, Navdip. "Violence and Migration: A Study of Killing in the Trains During the Partition of Punjab in 1947." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress 72* (2011): 947–54.
- Kellens, J. "AVESTA i. Survey of the History and Contents of the Book." In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. III, Fasc. 1:35–44, 2011. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/avesta-holy-book>.
- Khan, Omar. "Massacre Ghat, Cawnpore." Paper Jewels. Accessed June 3, 2021. <https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/massacre-ghat-cawnpore-0>.
- Khan, Razak. "The Case of Falling Walls: Politics of Demolition and Preservation in Rampur." *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, no. 20 (2014): 25–28.
- Khan, Yasmin. "Performing Peace: Gandhi's Assassination as a Critical Moment in the Consolidation of the Nehruvian State." *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 57–80.
- King, Christopher Rolland. *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in the Nineteenth Century North India*. Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Klostermaier, Klaus K. *A Survey of Hinduism*. 3rd ed. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007.
- Kolsky, Elizabeth. "The Colonial Rule of Law and the Legal Regime of Exception: Frontier 'Fanaticism' and State Violence in British India." *The American Historical Review* 120, no. 4 (October 2015): 1218–46.
- Kumar, Ruchi. "'Ambushed by the Taliban': Kandahar Locals Recount Danish Siddiqui's Death." NewsLaundry, July 20, 2021. <https://www.newslaundry.com/2021/07/20/ambushed-by-the-taliban-kandahar-locals-recall-danish-siddiquis-death>.
- Lakshmi, Aishwarya. "The Liminal Body: The Language of Pain and Symbolism Around Sati." *Feminist Review* 74, no. 1 (2003): 81–97.
- Laqueur, Thomas. "Bodies, Death, and Pauper Funerals." *Representations*, no. 1 (1983): 109–31.
- . *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains*. Princeton University Press, 2015.
- Latimer, C. *North-West Frontier Province*. Vol. XIII. Census of India, 1911. Peshawar: O.C. Anand & Sons, 1912.
- Lewis, Franklin. "Persian Literature and the Qur'ān." Edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Claude Gilliot, William A. Graham, Wadad Kadi, Andrew Rippin, Monique Bernards, and John Nawas. *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, n.d. Accessed March 3, 2021.
- Lhendup G Bhutia. "No Country for Dead Men." *Open The Magazine*, May 26, 2012. <https://openthemagazine.com/features/india/no-country-for-dead-men/>.
- Longworth, Philip. *The Unending Vigil: A History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission*. Constable, 1967.

- Loomba, Ania. "Dead Women Tell No Tales: Issues of Female Subjectivity, Subaltern Agency and Tradition in Colonial and Post-Colonial Writings on Window Immolation in India." *History Workshop* 36, no. 1 (1993): 209–27.
- Maclean, Kama. *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India: Violence, Image, Voice and Text*. Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Mahmood, Tahir. "Collaboration and British Military Recruitment: Fresh Perspectives from Colonial Punjab, 1914–1918." *Modern Asian Studies* 50, no. 5 (September 2016): 1474–1500.
- Major, Andrea. *Pious Flames: European Encounters with Sati, 1500-1830*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Makepeace, Margaret. "Finding Indian Soldiers Who Served in World War One." British Library: Untold Lives, September 9, 2014. <https://blogs.bl.uk/untoldlives/2014/09/finding-indian-soldiers-who-served-in-world-war-one.html>.
- Malone, Hannah. "New Life in the Modern Cultural History of Death." *The Historical Journal* 62, no. 3 (September 2019): 833–52.
- Mani, Lata. *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Manoj Sharma. "Fighting for Space: Delhi's Grave Problem." *Hindustan Times*, March 2, 2014. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi/fighting-for-space-delhi-s-grave-problem/story-M3QnwbSmp9n1qOyYnSNJ6I.html>.
- Marshall, P. J. *East Indian Fortunes: The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century*. Clarendon Press, 1976.
- Mazlish, Bruce. "Reviewed Work: Western Attitudes toward Death." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 5, no. 4 (Spring 1975): 751–52.
- Mbembe, Achille. "Necropolitics." Translated by Libby Meintjes. *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40.
- Mehta, Yagnesh Bharat. "Five Bodies Cremated on Single Pyre in Surat." *Times of India*, April 16, 2021. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/surat/five-bodies-cremated-on-single-pyre-in-surat/articleshow/82094745.cms>.
- Meri, Josef W. "Aspects of Baraka (Blessings) and Ritual Devotion Among Medieval Muslims and Jews." *Medieval Encounters* 5, no. 1 (1999): 46–69.
- Methri, Gloria. "Mortal Remains of Danish Siddiqui Arrive in Delhi; to Be Buried at Jamia Varsity Graveyard." *Republic World*. Accessed January 21, 2022. <https://www.republicworld.com/india-news/general-news/mortal-remains-of-danish-siddiqui-arrive-in-delhi-to-be-buried-at-jamia-varsity-graveyard.html>.
- Meyer-Fong, Tobie. *What Remains: Coming to Terms with Civil War in 19th Century China. What Remains*. Stanford University Press, 2013.
- Middleton, Townsend. "The Afterlives of a Killing: Assassination, Thanatos, and the Body Politic in South Asia." *Public Culture* 30, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 85–112.
- Milan Sharma. "Coronavirus: Is Delhi Govt Hiding Covid-19 Death Data?" *India Today*, May 10, 2020. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/coronavirus-delhi-death-toll-cases-hospitals-arvind-kejriwal-1676411-2020-05-10>.

- Mills, I.D. "The 1918-1919 Influenza Pandemic— The Indian Experience." *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 23, no. 1 (March 1986): 1–40.
- Mishra, Himanshu Shekhar. "India Beat All Odds In Coronavirus Fight, Says PM Modi." NDTV.com, January 28, 2021. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/there-will-be-more-made-in-india-vaccines-soon-says-pm-modi-2359470>.
- Moffat, Chris. "Bhagat Singh's Corpse." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 39, no. 3 (2016): 644–61.
- Mookherjee, Nayanika. "'Never Again': Aesthetics of 'Genocidal' Cosmopolitanism and the Bangladesh Liberation War Museum." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17 (May 1, 2011): S71–91.
- Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center. "Mortality Analyses." Accessed June 17, 2021. <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality>.
- Motlagh, Jason. "Highway to Hell: A Trip Down Afghanistan's Deadliest Road." *Rolling Stone*, January 22, 2021. <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/afghanistan-war-taliban-kabul-kandahar-road-1112819/>.
- Mukherjee, Janam. *Hungry Bengal: War, Famine and the End of Empire*. Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Mukherjee, Rudrangshu. *Spectre of Violence: The 1857 Kanpur Massacres*. Penguin Books, 2007.
- Mukherjee, Siddhartha. "Why Does the Pandemic Seem to Be Hitting Some Countries Harder Than Others?" *New Yorker*, February 22, 2021. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/03/01/why-does-the-pandemic-seem-to-be-hitting-some-countries-harder-than-others>.
- Murphy, Sean. "In Memoriam: Danish Siddiqui (1980-2021)," July 16, 2021. <https://www.pulitzer.org/news/memoriam-danish-siddiqui-1980-2021>.
- Hindustan Times. "Muslims to Run out of Burial Sites in Delhi in a Year: Report," November 23, 2018. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/muslims-to-run-out-of-burial-sites-in-delhi-in-a-year-report/story-mgk0nS2TKdMicKtsDIYmNN.html>.
- Nair, Rupam Jain. "Over My Dead Body! Indians Enjoy Graveyard Eatery." *Reuters*, June 19, 2007. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-graveyard-restaurant-idUSL197140020070619>.
- Nakash, Yitzhak. *The Shi'is of Iraq*. Princeton University Press, 1994.
- . "The Visitation of the Shrines of the Imams and the Shi'i Mujtahids in the Early Twentieth Century." *Studia Islamica*, no. 81 (1995): 153–64.
- Nandy, Ashis. "Sati: A Nineteenth-Century Tale of Women, Violence and Protest." In *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernization in India*, edited by V. C. Joshi. Delhi: Vikas, 1975.
- Nath, Damini. "Gandhi Memorial Sends Wood to Cremation Grounds in Delhi." *The Hindu*. April 30, 2021, sec. Delhi. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/gandhi-memorial-sends-wood-to-cremation-grounds-in-delhi/article34453028.ece>.

- Oberoi, Harjot. *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*. University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Oestigaard, Terje. "Cremations in Culture and Cosmology." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Death and Burial*, 497–510. Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Oman, John Campbell. *Cults, Customs and Superstitions of India*. T. F. Unwin, 1908.
- Omissi, David E. *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914-18*. London: Macmillan, 1999.
- Omissi, David E. *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940*. Macmillan, 1994.
- Orsini, Francesca. *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*. New Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Palsetia, Jesse S. *The Parsis of India: Preservation of Identity in Bombay City*. Brill, 2001.
- . "Zoroastrianism in India." In *The Religions of India: A Microcosm of World Religions*, edited by Meenaz Kassam, 225–46. New Delhi: Manohar, 2017.
- Pandey, Gyanendra. *Memory, History, and the Question of Violence: Reflections on the Reconstruction of Partition*. Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, 1999.
- . "Rallying Around the Cow: Sectarian Strife in the Bhojpuri Region, c.1888–1917." In *Subaltern Studies II*, edited by Ranajit Guha, 60–129. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- Parker, John. *In My Time of Dying: A History of Death and the Dead in West Africa*. Princeton University Press, 2021.
- Paxton, Nancy L. "Mobilizing Chivalry: Rape in British Novels about the Indian Uprising of 1857." *Victorian Studies* 36, no. 1 (1992).
- Pearson, Trais. *Sovereign Necropolis: The Politics of Death in Semi-Colonial Siam*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020.
- Imam Ali Network. "Personalities Buried in the Holy Shrine - Imam Ali (a.s) Network." Accessed February 25, 2021.  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20210225170703/https://www.imamali.net/?id=2463>.
- Pillai, Soumya. "Delhi's Crematoriums Run out of Wood, Seek Forest Dept's Help." *Hindustan Times*, April 28, 2021.  
<https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/delhi-news/delhis-crematoriums-run-out-of-wood-seek-forest-dept-s-help-101619559472773.html>.
- Pulla, Priyanka. "'The Epidemic Is Growing Very Rapidly': Indian Government Adviser Fears Coronavirus Crisis Will Worsen." *Nature* 583 (June 26, 2020): 180.
- Punjab District Gazetteers: Amritsar District, 1947*. Chandigarh: Controller of Printing and Stationary, 1947.
- Rajan, Rajeswari Sunder. "The Subject of Sati: Pain and Death in the Contemporary Discourse on Sati." *Yale Journal of Criticism* 3, no. 2 (1990): 1–27.
- Raman, Bhavani. *Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India*. University of Chicago Press, 2012.

- Ramnath, Maia. *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire*. University of California Press: Berkeley, 2011.
- Rana, Chahat, and Shahid Tantray. "How Gujarat Is Undercounting Its COVID-19 Deaths." *Caravan*, April 29, 2021. <https://caravanmagazine.in/health/how-gujarat-is-undercounting-its-covid19-deaths>.
- Times of India. "Remove Encroachments from Ahmedabad Graveyards Immediately: Waqf Tribunal," October 19, 2021. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/remove-encroachments-from-city-graveyards-immediately-waqf-tribunal/articleshow/87120770.cms>.
- "Report of the Special Committee to Review Historical Inequalities in Commemoration." Maidenhead, UK: Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 2021.
- Report on the Jails of the Central Provinces*. Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1899.
- Report on the Prison Administration in the United Provinces for 1935*. Allahabad: Printing & Stationary, 1936.
- Report on the Prison Administration in the United Provinces for 1941*. Allahabad: Printing & Stationary, 1942.
- Roy, Kaushik. "The Beginning of 'People's War' in India." *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 19 (2007): 1720–28.
- Rukmani, T.S. "Hindu Afterlife and Funerary Beliefs." In *The Routledge Companion to Death and Dying*, edited by Christopher Moreman, 110–18. London: Routledge, 2018.
- Rustom Gandhi. "Graveyard Encroachers? | Reader's Forum." *Parsiana*, October 21, 2018.
- Sahay, Abhinav. "Lucknow Municipality Mulls Using 30% Cow Dung Cakes for Cremation." *Hindustan Times*, August 26, 2020. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/lucknow-municipality-mulls-using-30-cow-dung-cakes-for-cremation/story-17CxnS8xOfkNUVegO7lygI.html>.
- Saikia, Yasmin. *Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.
- Saini, Ravinder. "Packed, Rohtak Crematoriums Face Wood Crunch." *Tribune*, April 29, 2021. <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/haryana/packed-rohtak-crematoriums-face-wood-crunch-246144>.
- Samarth, Aditi. "The Survival of Hindu Cremation Myths and Rituals in 21st Century Practice: Three Contemporary Case Studies." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Dallas, 2018.
- Sarkar, Tanika. *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001.
- . *Rebels, Wives, Saints: Designing Selves and Nations in Colonial Times*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009.
- Saxena, Astha. "EXCLUSIVE: Delhi's Dead Can't R.I.P, Burial Grounds Shrink Due to Rapid Urbanisation and Encroachment." *India Today*, April 28, 2016.

- <https://www.indiatoday.in/mail-today/story/delhis-dead-cant-rest-in-peace-320341-2016-04-28>.
- Saxena, R. K. *Social Reforms: Infanticide and Sati*. New Delhi: Trimurti Publications, 1975.
- Scott, James C. *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Sen, Satadru. "The Savage Family: Colonialism and Female Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century India." *Journal of Women's History* 14, no. 3 (2002): 53–79.
- Sethi, Chitleen K. "Haryana's Crematoria Need More Wood, so Govt Allows Forest Dept to Continue Tree-Felling." *ThePrint*, May 10, 2021.  
<https://theprint.in/india/governance/haryanas-crematoria-need-more-wood-so-govt-allows-forest-dept-to-continue-tree-felling/655893/>.
- Shakil, Sana. "Christian Cemeteries in Delhi Running out of Space." *New Indian Express*, December 15, 2018.  
<https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/delhi/2018/dec/15/christian-cemeteries-in-delhi-running-out-of-space-1911753.html>.
- Sharafi, Mitra. "Abortion in South Asia, 1860–1947: A Medico-Legal History." *Modern Asian Studies* 55, no. 2 (2021): 371–428.
- Sharma, Arvind. "On Hindu, Hindustān, Hinduism and Hindutva." *Numen* 49, no. 1 (2002): 1–36.
- Sharma, Jyotirmaya. "History as Revenge and Retaliation: Rereading Savarkar's 'The War of Independence of 1857.'" *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 19 (2007): 1717–19.
- Sharpe, Jenny. "The Unspeakable Limits of Rape: Colonial Violence and Counter-Insurgency." *Genders*, no. 10 (March 1991): 25–46.
- Shiwcharan, Clement Toolsie. "Indians in British Guiana, 1919-1929: A Study in Effort and Achievement." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Warwick, 1990.
- Siddiqui, Danish. *Documenting Conflict Beyond Borders | TEDxGateway*, 2020.  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/danish\\_siddiqui\\_documenting\\_conflict\\_beyond\\_borders](https://www.ted.com/talks/danish_siddiqui_documenting_conflict_beyond_borders).
- Siddiqui, Mansoor Ahman. "History of the Nawabi Regime of Rampur 1801-1949." PhD Thesis, V. B. S. Purvanchal University, 1997.
- Sidhant Sibal. "Danish Siddiqui's Mortal Remains to Reach India Shortly on Air India Plane. He Died of 'Multiple Gun Shot Wounds'." <https://t.co/UN8tnwhlAR>. Tweet. @sidhant, July 18, 2021.  
<https://twitter.com/sidhant/status/1416722830129975301>.
- Singh, Gajraj. *The Sikhs of Fiji*. South Pacific Social Sciences Association, 1972.
- Singh, Khushwant. *Train to Pakistan*. Grove Press, 1990.
- Singh, Madhu. "Bombay Fever/Spanish FLU: Public Health and Native Press in Colonial Bombay, 1918–19." *South Asia Research* 41, no. 1 (February 2021): 35–52.
- Singh, Paras. "Delhi: Pushed to the Limit, Crematoria Staring at Acute Wood Shortage." *Times of India*, April 28, 2021.  
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/pushed-to-the-limit-crematoria-staring-at-acute-wood-shortage/articleshow/82282020.cms>.

- Singhal, Pallavi. "As Covid Deaths Mount, Panchkula Cremation Ground Turns Away 15 Grieving Families." *Indian Express*, April 30, 2021. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/as-covid-deaths-mount-panchkula-cremation-ground-turns-away-15-grieving-families-7296174/>.
- Slater, Joanna, and Niha Masih. "India's Coronavirus Puzzle: Why Case Numbers Are Plummeting." *Washington Post*, February 4, 2021. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/india-coronavirus-cases/2021/02/04/d7f92f72-6562-11eb-bab8-707f8769d785\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/india-coronavirus-cases/2021/02/04/d7f92f72-6562-11eb-bab8-707f8769d785_story.html).
- Soherwordi, Syed Hussain Shaheed. "The Significance of the Different Names Applied by Historians to the Events of 1857." *Journal of Political Studies* 20, no. 1 (Summer 2013): 179–97.
- Solomon, R. V., and J. W. Bond. *Indian States: A Biographical, Historical, and Administrative Survey*. Asian Educational Services, 2006.
- Source Material for A History of the Freedom Movement of India*. Vol. II (1885-1920). Bombay: Government Central Press, 1958.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow Sacrifice." In *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, edited by Patrick Williams. Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Stephens, Julia. *Governing Islam: Law, Empire, and Secularism in Modern South Asia*. Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Stern, Philip J. *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Talbot, Ian. *Khizr Tiwana :The Punjab Unionist Party and the Partition of India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Tarlow, Sarah. *Harnessing the Power of the Criminal Corpse*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018.
- Tejani, Shabnum. "Cow Protection, Hindu Identity and the Politics of Hurt in India, c.1890–2019." *Emotions: History, Culture, Society* 3, no. 1 (June 2019): 136–57. [https://brill.com/view/journals/ehcs/3/1/article-p136\\_9.xml](https://brill.com/view/journals/ehcs/3/1/article-p136_9.xml).
- Thapar, Romila. "Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity." *Modern Asian Studies* 23, no. 2 (1989): 209–31.
- Threadcraft, Shatema. "North American Necropolitics and Gender: On #BlackLivesMatter and Black Femicide." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116, no. 3 (2017): 553–79.
- Thursby. *Hindu-Muslim Relations in British India: A Study of Controversy, Conflict and Communal Movements in Northern India, 1923-1928*. 1975. Reprint, Leiden: Brill, 2018.
- Tomasini, Floris. *Remembering and Disremembering the Dead: Posthumous Punishment, Harm and Redemption over Time*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017.
- Travers, Robert. "Death and the Nabob: Imperialism and Commemoration in Eighteenth-Century India." *Past & Present*, no. 196 (2007): 83–124.

- Trivedi, Saurabh. "Hindon Crematorium Struggles after E-Furnace Stops Working." *Hindu*. April 20, 2021, sec. Delhi. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/hindon-crematorium-struggles-after-e-furnace-stops-working/article34362372.ece>.
- . "Park Turned into Cremation Ground in Delhi." *Hindu*. April 26, 2021, sec. Delhi. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/park-turned-into-cremation-ground/article34409782.ece>.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1995.
- UN Assistance Mission for Iraq. "Military Map of Najaf." July 6, 2003. 1:15,000. Iraq. <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/1290274.html>.
- Utne, Kelsey. "Bodies in the Way: Delhi's Dead and the Pressures of Space." *Nursing Clio*, September 24, 2020. <https://nursingclio.org/2020/09/24/bodies-in-the-way-delhis-dead-and-the-pressures-of-space/>.
- . "The Traveling Bones of Jamaluddin Al-Afghani." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, forthcoming.
- Vanaik, Anish. "Representing Commodified Space: Maps, Leases, Auctions and 'Narrations' of Property in Delhi, c.1900–47." *Historical Research* 88, no. 240 (2015): 314–32.
- Von Denffer, Dietrich. "Baraka as Basic Concept of Muslim Popular Belief." *Islamic Studies* 15, no. 3 (1976): 167–86.
- Wagner, Kim. *The Great Fear of 1857: Rumours, Conspiracies and the Making of the Indian Uprising*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010.
- . *The Skull of Alum Bheg: The Life and Death of a Rebel of 1857*. Oxford University Press, 2018.
- . "'Calculated to Strike Terror': The Amritsar Massacre and the Spectacle of Colonial Violence." *Past & Present* 233, no. 1 (November 2016): 185–225.
- Ward, Andrew. *Our Bones Are Scattered: The Cawnpore Massacres and The Indian Mutiny Of 1857*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1996.
- Whaley, Joachim. "Introduction." In *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death*, edited by Joachim Whaley, 1–14. London: Europa, 1981.
- White, Stephen. "A Burial Ahead of Its Time? The Crookenden Burial Case and the Sanctioning of Cremation in England and Wales." *Mortality* 7, no. 2 (July 2002): 171–90.
- Willis, Graham Denyer. "The Potter's Field." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 60, no. 3 (July 2018): 539–68.
- Winter, J. M. *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*. Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- World Bank. "Population, Total - India | Data." The World Bank Group. Accessed June 17, 2021. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=IN>.
- Yang, Anand A. "Whose Sati?: Widow Burning in Early 19th Century India." *Journal of Women's History* 1, no. 2 (Fall 1989): 8–33.
- Yo Gamma Gamma The Infrastructure Flufferbot. "@CassandraTSLAQ Also Notable, despite the Fact That India Is Having Problems with the New Variant,

Their per Capita Infection Rate Is Still Less than Half the US Peak This Winter.” Tweet. @Flufferbot2, May 13, 2021.

<https://twitter.com/Flufferbot2/status/1392851171501477890>.

Yong, Tan Tai. *The Garrison State: Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab, 1849-1947*. SAGE, 2005.

Zykov, Anton. “Zoroastrian Funeral Practices: Transition in Conduct.” In *Threads of Continuity: Zoroastrian Life & Culture*, edited by Shernaz Cama, 287–305. New Delhi: Parzor Foundation, 2016.