

# ICOA1663: SITES FOR COMMEMORATION: TRAUMA, MEMORY AND PRACTICE OF RECONCILIATION

## Subtheme 01: Integrating Heritage and Sustainable Urban Development by engaging diverse Communities for Heritage Management

**Session 1:** Sustainable Development and Community Engagement

**Location:** Gulmohar Hall, India Habitat Centre

**Time:** December 13, 2017, 9:55 - 10:10

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*Churnjeet Mahn is an academic working on the themes of partition and memory in Punjab. Mahn, Murphy and Rao have been working with the conservation architects, CRCI, on heritage projects in Punjab.*

**Abstract:** This paper proceeds from a concern for how memories continue to be both allowed for and erased within and in relation to experiences of trauma and exclusion. We focus on two quite distinctive sites for memory-making, to allow for productive comparison: firstly, memorial locations located along and across the Indo-Pakistan border, with reference to the "larger Punjab" (in cultural, religious, and linguistic terms) that is so easily erased from the memorial landscape in adherence to national and nationalizing boundaries; and secondly, experiences of trauma within and in relation to Canadian nation-building, which includes both experiences of trauma for those excluded from the national imaginary (such as the indigenous people of Canada, and other racialized and marginalized communities) and the experiences of trauma that have brought so many to Canada in search of refuge. The paper is centred on practice, as well as theory, and is constructed around two projects that aim to foster reconciliation through and within memory work: (1) a recent project conducted at a tourist site in Sirhind, Punjab to think about how the historical lives of monuments are censored and erased, and a related ongoing project to foster memories of pre-partition shared cultural traditions in post-partition Indian Punjab in light of the 70th anniversary of Partition, and (2) a project entitled "Trauma, Memory and the Story of Canada," a series of art exhibitions, interpretation events, and theatrical production that explores the "difficult stories" that comprise the story of Canada at the 150th commemoration of the Confederation of Canada; this latter project has been funded through a major grant from the Canada 150 Fund from Canadian Heritage and was conceptualized by the South Asian Canadian Histories Association (SACHA), a collective of artists, arts professionals, and scholars who seek to integrate historical research and the arts in public-facing projects. These parallel anniversaries--of the founding of India and Canada--allow us an opportunity to consider what is at stake in commemorations, and what conditions of possibility can allow for reconciliation in relation to our troubled pasts.

**Key words:** *Community, development, participation, heritage, democracy, Punjab*

## **Background to HRIDAY Amritsar, Punjab**

The HRIDAY (Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana) programme, a flagship programme for the Ministry of Urban Development has called for, <<a focus on holistic development of heritage cities. The scheme aims to preserve and revitalise soul of the heritage city to reflect the city's unique character by encouraging aesthetically appealing, accessible, informative & secured environment>><sup>1</sup>. Running from 2014 to 2018, it provided an opportunity for multidisciplinary teams to place the heritage needs, and infrastructure needs, of a city in dialogue with one another. This approach is vital to complicating the way we understand the needs of rapidly urbanising cities in India. What happens when engineers no longer direct the narrative of urban development and work with conservation specialists not simply to preserve and restore sites of historical interest, but to weave the narrative of heritage, community, belonging and place into the city more comprehensively? What does it mean to revitalise the soul of a city through heritage? How can we frame accessibility beyond the materiality of accessible buildings and routes? In other words, what can democratising access to how heritage is articulated open new possibilities for capturing a city's unique soul?

Gurmeet S Rai, Director of Cultural Resource Conservation Initiative (India), is the HRIDAY anchor for Amritsar and Churnjeet Mahn is an academic working in areas related to the humanities and heritage in the UK. Together, we have been discussing means and methods for greater participation in the articulation of heritage in Amritsar, Punjab. In the 70th anniversary of Partition, it is worth remembering Amritsar's role as a border city which was heavily impacted by forced migration and displacement. As a historical site at the centre of confluence between religions, cultures and practices, partition significantly reshaped the city's demographic. Amritsar's significance to Sikhs can be seen in the Sri Harmandir Sahib, but also in the legacy of the last ruler of independent Punjab, Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The remit of any integrated attempt to revitalise Amritsar's soul is also a call to bring together the turbulent and sometimes traumatic history of the region with its historical continuity, resilience and rich historical fabric which includes layers of colonial history, pre-partition history, etc.

## **Creative interruptions: memory and the practice of reconciliation**

Through an Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK) project grant, *Creative Interruptions*, Rai and Mahn have been collaborating on a discreet project to consider the ways in which communities traditionally marginalised from heritage and its management can participate in its articulation. While traditional practices of heritage preservation in urban contexts have focussed on producing authorised narratives to be transmitted to communities and tourists, our focus has been on how we can democratise, diversify and multiply the range of voices, stories and narratives on offer. But why do this to begin with? To begin with, is the notion of who is qualified to have a perspective on heritage. HRIDAY's approach to understanding a holistic view has been to create interdisciplinary teams, bringing engineers in dialogue with heritage experts. But is it enough to talk amongst these kinds of experts? The risk in this situation is to assume rather than include the views and perspectives of communities who are read simply as beneficiaries rather than stakeholders. The radical potential of expanding the definition of heritage expert has been increasingly explored by scholars: <<Not only are many people overlooked as authorities capable of adjudicating their own sense of heritage, so too is their lack of access to necessary resources. They are, in effect, subordinated and impeded because they do not hold the title 'heritage expert', we well as lacking the resources assumed necessary to participate in heritage projects (Western schooling,

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<sup>1</sup><http://hridayindia.in/>, 2017.

economic means, etc.), and also potentially ‘lacking’ a particular vision or understanding of heritage and the accepted values that underpin this vision (universality, national and aesthetic values, etc.)>><sup>2</sup>.

As suggested earlier, while the Sri Harmandir Sahib is central to Amritsar’s self-presentation of its historical significance and value, how can we reconcile this with the other sites and narratives of historical interest and importance? This process is two-fold. First, we require more expansive and capacious definitions of heritage that admit crafts practices, intangible heritage, and vernacular approaches to heritage. For example, how do we capture the story of a Muslim craftsman, working in a market in Amritsar, who may participate in a range of religious practice out of respect? How do we capture the stories of women who have travelled through marriage from neighbouring villages and carry with them songs, folklore and dances from vernacular Punjabi? And more importantly, how can we engage with these people in a collective sense of heritage connected to Amritsar? Heritage in its practice and materiality is ‘messy’.

We do not have the scope to cover all of these issues in this paper, but we will offer you one example in generating community participation and consultation through the Rambagh Gate, seen in Fig 1. The Rambagh Gate is a remnant from Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s walled city and formed an important route from his summer palace (at the Rambagh Garden) to the Sri Harmandir Sahib. The Gate has received funding from the Punjab Heritage and Tourism Board but as seen in the figure, it is generally obscured from view (local taxi drivers are usually unaware of its existence) and the markets around the site continue to encroach. While the removal of a police station from the Gate’s interior was an achievement, there has been a question about what preservation or conservation means at this site. To restore it to heritage and cultural memory is the first step, but should this demand the removal of the market surrounding the Gate? This site has been identified by CRCI as having the potential for a People’s Museum which would not necessitate the removal of the street market around the Gate; rather, it would work with that community of sellers to consider how to develop sympathetic heritage management.



*Fig.1– Rambagh Gate, Amritsar (CRCI).*

During a phase of community consultation through the market, one of the project interviewers produced a reflection on her conversations: <<On the matter of cultural representation, all people agree to the idea of the museum. They believe that a museum will profit them all. On being told about the museum, they imagine a space like Heritage Street, which according to them will attract a lot of tourists and will be a

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<sup>2</sup>Waterton and Smith, 2010, p10.

boost to the businesses. They also believe that the area will then become more ‘clean’ and ‘ordered’. Some of the shopkeepers tend to think that the municipality shops around Rambagh Gate have to be removed. But when it comes to contents of the museum, the people are divided on whether they want it to represent and glorify Ranjit Singh, or whether they want it to document the history of the bazaar. Some shopkeepers like Sunil Gupta, have suggested that in case a museum on the bazaar is made, then displaying the famous wares of Amritsar, like the syrups and the *papads*, with a brief history of the bazaar will attract more buyers from outside. People like Charan Das think that if renowned shops like his Mahajan Ice cream are featured in the museum, it will help him fight competition from big ice cream brands.>><sup>3</sup>. This interaction betrays the complexity of perspectives, community consultation does not necessarily produce more democratic visions of heritage, as in this case, it can present another set of interests and agendas. The self-consciousness of how the presentation and commercialization of heritage can act as an economic accelerant is a double-edged sword. From whom is heritage produced? For consumption by the pilgrim, the visitor, the tourist, or for local communities who can use it as a vehicle for understanding their own connection to place? To what extent are these agendas incompatible?

The reference to Heritge Street in the quote above responds to the current investment in developing the area around the Sri Harmandir Sahib, a development which has been critiqued by many factions: <<The facades of all buildings are blushing pink in Kota stone tiles and trellis screens and this includes the market places and shops selling the city’s famous “pappar-warhian”, Punjabi “juttis”, religious artefacts and much more. It is disbelief for a moment that one is perhaps a trespasser into a cinema studio all painted and unreal waiting for directors to call the shots. Even shopkeepers look like some junior artistes who do not know how to play their part and what lines to say. The grimy Dharam Singh Market on the Golden Temple road has been turned into pretty pink, and right in front is a rectangular block on which life-size bhangra dancers, carved out of black marble, are jeering and striking poses>><sup>4</sup>. The stultification and artificiality of the presentation is something entirely unsympathetic to the project of revitalising the soul of Amritsar. Community consultation does not equate into easy answers or solutions. Rather than ‘picking’ and ‘choosing’ from responses, it is important to allow participants to contribute in larger and complex contexts, where they can co-produce decisions rather than simply inform them. While CRCI is working on a larger project around inclusive museum design, in the meantime we have been working on smaller arts-based collaborations with a view to changing, challenging and disrupting the way people perceive their environment.



Fig.2– Gurmeet S. Rai in market consultation, Amritsar (CRCI).

<sup>3</sup>CRCI Report, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Dutt, 2016.

We have initiated a range of artist residencies to work with local groups and educational institutions to produce permanent and semi-permanent installations in the city which combine the historical research of academics, the local research and knowledge of participants, and the practice-based expertise of artists experienced in public art. Our overall purpose is to produce an environment and engaged process for producing art which can consider the environment (what are the materials used, where is art 'needed?'), content (what should we be representing?) and process (how do we value different kinds of expertise, how do we use them?). The result of our work will vary from art that will be instantly disposable (allowing for shorter term interactions around specific issues) to longer-term pieces (what is worthy of permanence?).

## **Conclusion**

What are the memories we preserve? Is it the memories of rulers and religious leaders or of the everyday? Which has more power; the story of the few or the many? How do we bring together voices from the street, the home, the palace, the colonial club, the government building? These are challenges that any practitioner working in democratic visions of heritage must consider. This paper has offered a brief glimpse into how inclusive processes are working in a project in Amritsar, where the basics of community consultation and inclusion are developed into more dynamic models of participation.

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Fig.1– Rambagh Gate, Amritsar (CRCI).

Fig.2– Gurmeet S. Rai in market consultation, Amritsar (CRCI).

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## Sous-thème 01: Intégrer le patrimoine et le développement urbain durable en engageant Diverses communautés pour la gestion du patrimoine

**Session 1:** Développement durable et engagement communautaire

**Lieu:** Hall Gulmohur, India Habitat Centre

**Date et heure:** 13 Décembre, 2017, 9:55 -10:10

**Auteurs:** Churnjeet Mahn, Anne Murphy, Raghavendra Rao K.V

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**Résumé:** Cette communication se préoccupe de la façon dont les souvenirs continuent à être à la fois entretenus et effacés dans les expériences de traumatisme et d'exclusion ou en relation avec elles. Nous nous concentrons sur deux sites particuliers en matière de création de mémoire, pour permettre une comparaison fructueuse : d'abord, les sites commémoratifs situés le long et à travers de la frontière indo-pakistanaise, en référence au « Grand Penjab » (en termes culturels, religieux et linguistiques) qui est si facilement effacé du paysage commémoratif attaché aux frontières nationales; ensuite, des expériences de traumatisme liées à l'édification de la nation canadienne : à la fois, celle des exclus du récit national (comme les peuples autochtones du Canada et d'autres groupes victimes de racisme et marginalisés) et l'expérience de ceux qui sont venus si nombreux au Canada à la recherche d'un refuge.

La présentation s'appuie sur la pratique autant que sur la théorie, et s'articule autour de deux projets visant à favoriser la réconciliation

travers le travail de mémoire : (1) un projet récent mené sur un site touristique à Sirhind (Penjab) pour réfléchir à la façon dont

l'histoire des monuments est censurée et effacée, et un projet connexe en cours pour favoriser des souvenirs de traditions culturelles

partagées avant la partition dans le Pendjab indien post-partition à la lumière du 70<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de celle-ci, et un projet intitulé « *Traumatisme, Mémoire et histoire du Canada* », une série d'expositions artistiques, d'activités d'interprétation et de production

théâtrale qui explore les « *histoires difficiles* » qui composent l'histoire du Canada, pour le 150<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de la Confédération du Canada ; ce dernier projet a été financé par une importante subvention du fonds « Canada 150 » de l'institution Patrimoine canadien ; il a été conçu par l'Association des histoires canadiennes et du Sud-Asiatique (SACHA), un collectif d'artistes, de professionnels des arts et de chercheurs qui cherche à intégrer la recherche historique et les arts dans des projets publics. Ces anniversaires parallèles

– de l’Inde et du Canada – nous donnent l’occasion de considérer ce qui est en jeu dans les commémorations, et quelles sont les conditions qui peuvent rendre possible la réconciliation avec nos passés troublés.