From the Rajghat to India Gate: Places of Memory, Sites of State Sovereignty and Public Dissent

Abstract:

Indian historians and urban anthropologists have surprisingly ignored the problematic issue of state sponsored commemorative sites, their symbolic configuration, the rituals associated with these monuments and their ideological politics. Commemorative architectures of the state – tombs, cenotaphs, mausoleums etc. – are not just monuments of memory but they play a significant role in indoctrinating ideologies in the national consciousness. Raised predominantly as displays of the state's grandeur, sovereignty and authority, they are often appropriated as amphitheatres of protest by the masses. In times of political crisis the civil society acquires the symbolism and metaphors of the same monuments to protest against the bellicosity of the state. This paper attempts to analyse how memories are selectively invoked, constructed or attributed to these monuments by the contesting parties – the state and the people. In recurring performances of sovereignty and dissent the character of the monuments goes through consecutive upheavals. Focusing on two sites of memory – Rajghat, Mahatma Gandhi's memorial, and the India Gate, a cenotaph for Indian soldiers and martyrs – that have played a significant role in the nation's history, the paper navigates through these transformations of the sites and the embodied memories.

Keywords: *Rajghat, India Gate, dissent, performance, memory.*