



SWEDISH  
COLLEGIUM  
for ADVANCED STUDY

## REGULAR SESSION INFORMATION

**Session:** Shards of Memory: Memorials, Commemorations, Remembrance

**Session Convener(s):** Radhika Chopra, University of Delhi

**Chair:** Shail Mayaram, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi

**Comments:** -

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I) *A Shrine and its Museum: Memory, History and Visual Politics in the Sikh Golden Temple*  
Radhika Chopra, University of Delhi

II) *Representations of Violence and Memory in Contemporary Sri Lankan Visual Arts*  
Sasanka Perera, University of Colombo

III) *Recounting and Remembering in a Forgotten Land*  
Soibam Haripriya, University of Delhi

IV) *Victimization of the Collective Memory of the Deported People: Case of Crimea*  
Tatiana Senyushkina, Taurida National V.I. Vernadsky University, Simferopol

Discussant: Rukmini Sen, Ambedkar University, Delhi

## ABSTRACTS

### Session description

Dreadful times produce special stories. Even when remembrance of a dark past is a burden too heavy, stories told in different narrative modes enable groups to recall some of the details of dread while simultaneously burying other aspects of their dark histories. Monuments, rituals, museums, shrines and cenotaphs become set apart and sacred objects not only because they represent a place to recall the past but also in the telling and re-telling of what they are about, they enable different memories and forms of remembrance.

Surprisingly little literature exists on memorials in contemporary South Asia though there have been (and continue to be) areas in the region riddled by harsh conflicts and troublesome memories. Some attention has been paid to monuments and memorials of colonial pasts – for example to memorials of the 1857 Mutiny in India. But at the moment, the field of remembrance is dominated by scholarship of events in the global “West”: the American civil war, the two World Wars, the Holocaust, among others.

The papers of the panel “Shards of Memory” will focus on contemporary political turmoil, primarily in South Asia, and the politics of remembrance. Precisely because conflicts are thought of in the present continuous, the ‘past’ is a fluid terrain; but it is exactly this ‘fluid’ character of a not-quite-past event that generates a different modes and sites of remembrance and commemoration, ranging from the seemingly ‘temporary’ and impermanent roadside shrines to more enduring modes of the museum. Events, people, and political identities may be remembered through a series of different memorials, spread across space. Each may present the facade of completeness but in fact be a fragment, a shard that emerges as connected or contested within different modes and politics of remembrance.

Papers will draw from different regions/nations/collectives in south Asia. The intent will be to explore the ‘claims’ to tell stories about events, mourn people or assert identity through representing the past in the present.

### Papers

I) *A Shrine and its Museum: Memory, History and Visual Politics in the Sikh Golden Temple*

Radhika Chopra, University of Delhi

The past, Marx warned us in his Eighteenth Brumaire, weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living, producing an intense sense of disquiet. It is to the past as a nightmare that I address myself in this paper, focusing on the museum in the premier Sikh shrine, the Darbar Sahib in Punjab. Museums as sites of sanctioned histories are spaces where a sense of common destiny and history are forged through remembrance and willed forgetfulness. During the military assault of the sacred complex mounted by the Indian Army in June 1984, (widely known as ‘Operation Bluestar’) the Central Sikh Museum and many of its holdings were destroyed by rocket propelled grenade launchers. Subsequent restoration efforts ran into the problem of what the museum should exhibit. My paper reflects on the politics of reconstruction and restoration, studying the current exhibits in the galleries of the museum to understand the politics of memory.

A lineage of medieval to modern martyrs is created in the layout of museum spaces and the display of ‘war paintings’, religious landscapes and portraits in an effort to recreate and represent the community of believers to itself. Remembrance however, remains incomplete. For many years, portraits of key martyrs were “missing” from the walls of the Museum. More than 20 years after the museum began to be rebuilt subsequent installation and rearrangements reflect the uneasy shifts in commemoration and remembrance. This is particularly apparent in the visual referencing of Bhindranwale, a key figure of the militant movement for Khalistan. Analysing the visual as an

ordering narrative of memory and memorialising within the overarching landscape of the Golden Temple, I re-look at the politics of representation and elision to think through issues of a nightmare remembered.

## II) *Representations of Violence and Memory in Contemporary Sri Lankan Visual Arts*

Sasanka Perera, University of Colombo

The civil war in Sri Lanka involving a variety of ethnic Tamil Insurgent groups and the Sinhala dominated armed forces of the Sri Lankan state continued for thirty years before the decisive victory of Sri Lankan armed forces in May 2009 which completely militarily eliminated the last remaining insurgent group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). It had done most of the fighting against the state over the previous 15 years. This was one cycle of violence Sri Lanka had experienced in recent times. The other cycle of violence lasting from the mid 1980s to late 1980s was focused on the south of the country and was the prerogative of the Sinhala insurgent group, the Janata Vimukti Peramuna (People's Liberation Front) and the state security forces as well as para-military groups. The overall context of this paper is the extensive destruction of property and human life and resultant socio-political and emotional fallout of these two phases of violence. In this context, one of the contested issues that emerge has to do with the legitimacy, authenticity and the audibility of the voices that claim to represent the narratives of the violence.

The most dominant narrative is that of the state which carries its own interpretations and silences. Comparatively, academic narratives as well as narratives of poetry or other local discourses of creative writing are clearly minimal compared to the aftermath of comparative global and regional situations including the entrenched violence of the partition of India or World War Two.

In this relative absence, Sri Lankan visual art, which includes painting, sculpture, installation, performance art and film, has presented an extremely active and vocal discourse on the violence and its consequences as well as consistent opposition to it. In Sri Lanka, visual art is clearly the most active and creative form of expression today as it has been for over a decade. Within this context, the paper will focus on Sri Lankan visual arts of the 1990s as a repository of violent memories and attempt to contextualize what they narrate, what the silences are, and the overall politics they represent, not simply as part of recent Sri Lankan art history but more importantly, from the point of view of recent social and political history.

## III) *Recounting and Remembering in a Forgotten Land*

Soibam Haripriya, University of Delhi

In a geo-political entity fractured by violence, memorialisation has become a manifestation of the need to fight against forgetfulness. There are efforts to monumentalise and memorialise death caused by political or social conflict. The norms of memorialisation juxtapose chronologically separate events rendering them continuous—both spatially and visually. There is an attempt to propel memorialisation beyond the observation of a brutal absence and transform it to an intellectual engagement. To articulate this formulation, I analyse two Memorial Lectures considered important in the collective mourning of the people of Manipur valley in recent times. The paper focuses on the ways of memorialisation as seen in the memorial lectures which not only celebrates the oeuvre of two *martyred* personalities (separately) but also makes an attempt at nurturing a legacy through contemporary debates. The 'ritual' and 'visual' prelude to these two lectures share the same spatial frame. Temporally, the two events begin with 'lamentations' and then slid into an intended discursive practice. The overlapping of the 'emotional' and the 'intellectual' seem inevitable as the latter (in the case of the memorial lectures) stems from the former. This presents

a rupture in the effort to propel memories into ways of looking at contemporary issues and events. The burden of memories and resisting forgetfulness necessitates the narratives of recounting and remembering.

IV) *Victimization of the Collective Memory of the Deported People: Case of Crimea*

Tatiana Senyushkina, Taurida National V.I. Vernadsky University, Simferopol

For over two decades, the societies of post-totalitarian states pass through a complex transformation. In this context, the problem of collective memory is one of the central and key in researches of a contemporary sociology of post communist states, which is formulating a new front and new research questions. Not accidentally, one of the central places in the cultural and historical works of recent years have taken the concept of "historical culture" or "culture of memory" - a phenomenon closely related to the process of formation of identity of any community.

French sociologist and anthropologist Maurice Halbwachs, believed that "memory" is a construction of social groups. Halbwachs made a clear distinction between collective memory, which he regarded as a social construct, created or modified in accordance with a system of values, and "written" history, which, because of its claims to use scientific methods and the freedom of personal interpretation can be more objective. The collective memory is not a stable phenomenon, but the object of the historical process, since it, according to the researcher, the fundamental core concepts of the nation about itself.