

## The 1857 Indian Uprising and the Politics of Commemoration

The Cawnpore Well, Lucknow Residency, and Delhi Ridge were sacred places within the British imagination of India. Sanctified by the colonial administration in commemoration of victory over the ‘Sepoy Mutiny’ of 1857, they were read as emblems of empire, which embodied the central tenets of sacrifice, fortitude, and military prowess that underpinned Britain’s imperial project. Since independence, however, these sites have been rededicated in honour of the ‘First War of Independence’ and are thus sacred to the memory of those who revolted against colonial rule, rather than those who saved it. *The 1857 Indian Uprising and the Politics of Commemoration* tells the story of these and other commemorative landscapes and uses them as prisms through which to view over 150 years of Indian history. Based on extensive archival research from India and Britain, Sebastian Raj Pender traces the ways in which commemoration responded to the demands of successive historical moments by shaping the events of 1857 from the perspective of the present. By telling the history of India through the transformation of mnemonic space, this study shows that remembering the past is always a political act.

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Sebastian Raj Pender

*University of Oxford*



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This book is dedicated to Janet, who never stopped reading, Ranjit, who never stopped believing, Tatsiana, who never stopped loving, and Florence, who never stopped paying!

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## Acknowledgements

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My fascination with the history of India was born over the course of one remarkable summer when I was around fifteen years old. I had grown up listening to the stories of Madan Singh, my paternal grandfather, describing his time serving in the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) during the Second World War and better still his account of the RIN ‘Mutiny’ of 1946, in which he had played a notable part. But it was during that long summer holiday that I rigged up an old ADAT audio recorder and spent several weeks documenting his remarkable life. My task was made much easier by having such a willing subject! My grandfather would spend many hours writing and arranging his notes in the evening so that he would be ready to help organise his interrogator’s haphazard questions into a coherent narrative the following day. The result was a long series of often comical, but sometimes tragic, personal anecdotes of events that occurred in India, the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, the Middle East, and Africa, all seamlessly blended into an overarching story of the end of empire, and the complex and bloody process of decolonisation.

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Abbreviations

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ASI	Archaeological Survey of India
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BMGS	British Monuments and Graves Section of the High Commission
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
CRO	Commonwealth Relations Office
EIC	East India Company
IOR	India Office Records
IWM	Imperial War Museum, London
LDTA	Lucknow Diocesan Trust Association
MLN	Maharani Lakshmibai Nyas
NAI	National Archives of India, Delhi
OBC	Other Backward Class
OIOC	Oriental and India Office Collection, the British Library, London
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SP	Samajwadi Party
SPG	Society for the Propagation of the Gospel
TNA	The National Archives, Kew, London
UKHCI	United Kingdom High Commission in India
UP	Uttar Pradesh
USPG	United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel

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