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OPINION

THE INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE INVENTORY OF INDIA

Moulshri Joshi

The Industrial Heritage Inventory attempts to report on what exists in India under the loosely defined term 'industrial heritage'. For several years there has been no TICCIH national report from India. This is partly due to the newness of the concept. Heritage practitioners are only beginning to take stock of our modern scientific and technological heritage. Knowledge and documentation lies distributed across many fields and many places. Disciplines and formal sources are secondary to the living memory of the industrial culture.

The inventory brings together 100 sites from across India. There are 34 sites of production and manufacturing, 37 sites of infrastructure, four marking industrial disasters and ten sites that preserve and interpret industrial history as museums or educational institutions. Some sites are recognized at local or national level but most are unacknowledged. Only 30 of the 100 remain out of use and indicate, albeit disproportionately so, the limited extent and slowness of de-industrialization in India. Here this Past has not passed on, at least not as yet. And even though former industrial megacities such

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Children of Jharia, the burning coal town, Photo: Ronny Sen.

as Bombay and Calcutta have already seen a century of steady de-industrialization, concerned disciplines have not started taking stock of its relics and legacy in a systematic manner.

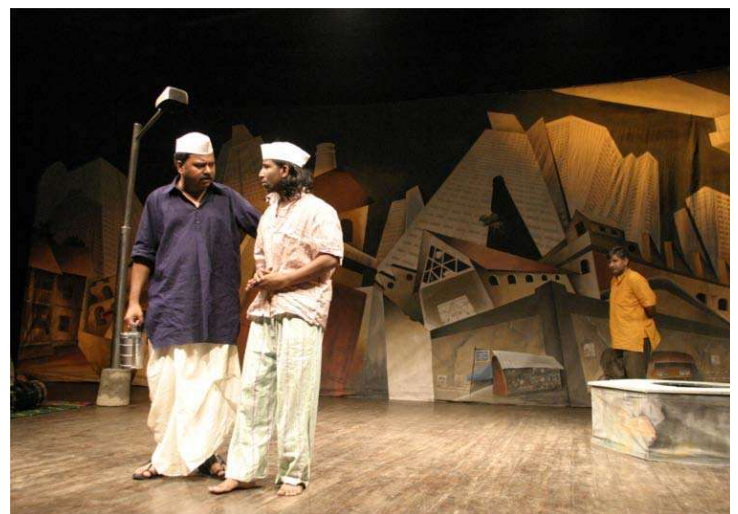
Identifying Themes The inventory opens up the sheer wealth of built heritage that lies within the country presenting a deep and continuous history of technological heritage. Kallanai Dam, built over 2000 years ago across 69,000 acres of fertile delta and still in operation; the rust-free, metallurgical marvel of the Delhi Iron Pillar which weights 6000kgs and has resisted corrosion for 16 centuries; these are sites that draw our attention to a past that was inventive and advanced. Terms such as 'traditional' or 'proto-industrial' may not capture its spirit entirely.

The story of Indian struggle for independence is closely linked to the story of the struggle for its workers. The Salt fields of Dandi and Dharsana salt factory were sites of protest against sanctions imposed by the British on indigenous production of salt. Mahatma Gandhi's call for adopting indigenous lifestyle and rejecting British (machine-made) goods was a frontal attack on the imperial industrial economy but also a philosophical tenet co-opting people into a small, sustainable way of life.

Looking back, the decades belonging to the early industrial revolution in Europe coincided with the British rule in India. Vigorous trading and related expansion by the French, Danes, Portuguese and Dutch continued alongside. Some spectacular projects were envisaged and developed during this period through a partnership between the British and the people of the Indian subcontinent that was morally and practically untenable. The UNESCO World Heritage site of Victoria Terminus in Mumbai is an example of this legacy.

It must be said here that the magnificent industrialization of Colonial India, bringing together cultures so remarkably different, cannot be seen through the innocuous concept of 'shared heritage'. The collaboration of the colonial agency with the Indian counterparts was never a marriage of equals or a partnership of mutual benefit. The industrialization of India in all its cosmopolitanism was based on the self-serving enterprise of the British fuelled by an exploited, invisible workforce. The documentation of this history is very one-sided, sometimes constructing an almost-altruistic nature of the Raj and romanticizing a heavily unequal relationship between a white man and the brown ones. Women of both colors, remain conspicuously absent from these narratives. The mainstream discourse on 'shared heritage' is packaged in feel-good veneer, deliberately overlooking the exploitation of people, omissions of their history or turning their reality into fantastical versions.

Relics of the British Raj include the technological vestiges of the princely states of India, provinces ruled through alliance and not annexure. These autonomous, sometimes rogue, states produced sites of significant historic importance parallel to the imperial project of modernity. The Nawab Railway Station of Rampur is an example of provincial efforts at industrializing. Such examples are rich in demonstrating the cross-cultural world the royals lived in and the temperament of making things provincially, of experimentation and resource-



Play titled 'Cotton 56, Polyester 84' that tells the story of the cotton mill district of Mumbai city, Source : Critical Stages, The IATC webjournal.

OPINION



The private railway station of the Nawab or Ruler of Rampur, put to newer uses (2016)

fulness within a larger and sometimes distinct narrative of colonial history outside.

I have learnt from my experience of working at the site of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy that disasters are chronic occurrences within the industrial regime. Much like the waste produced during the production process, they may be minimized but not entirely avoided. Coalmines of Jharia, a storehouse of the country's prime coke coal that have been on fire for over a century, is a particularly dystopian example of this negative heritage. Estimates vary between 400-700,000 people who continue to live on and off these mines literally smouldering under their homes. Our inventories and lists need to find space to accommodate these dissonant sites.

Modern industry identifies itself as a bedrock of strong nations, their heritage lends itself very well to the construction of a rhetoric of nationalism. The Indian welfare state relied upon an industrial future to create the foundation of an unbounded modernity. Prime Minister Nehru in a legendary statement appointed these sites as 'temples of modern India'. All across the country, some of our biggest and finest establishments were set up in the years preceding Independence and this industrial temperament was celebrated. Some examples are Sindri Chemical Plant, Bhakhra Nangal Dam, Apsara Nuclear Reactor and gridiron townships of Jamshedpur, Rourkela and Durgapur. Today, many of these sites are on hard times due to economic liberalization.

Lying just beneath the surface of the industrial sites and monuments are intangible memories that need have been included in the inventory. Illustrations of processes in the manufacture of opium in Patna, Bihar by Company Painter Shiva Lal (c.1817-1887) are revealing of the Company culture and life of the Indian indentured workers. It is not hard to discern the brutality embedded in the genteel paintings commissioned by the Company. Shiva Lal's paintings are reminiscent of Sakubei Yamamoto's coal mining paintings from industrial Japan which are now listed in the Memory of the World Register of UNESCO.



A postage stamp commemorating Gandhi's march to Dandi saltfields where he launched Satyagraha, an act of nonviolent civil disobedience in colonial India to protest against the British salt monopoly. Photo: www.istampgallery.com

Although only few, the inventory records institutions which work in the field of documentation and preservation of this heritage. Museums such as the National Rail Museum, an immersive museum of railway heritage containing amongst other gems the world's oldest working steam locomotive in operational service, serve as educational centers.

While the scope and scalability of this project is immense, the question of limits has been a constant concern. Given that the recognition of 'industry' as 'heritage' in India, has few precedents, what will be the terms of reference for sites from this inventory? If the Asian experience is indeed different from the experience of the West, how do we organize it into a useful and robust rubric? The answers to these questions will depend on the process we take to deliberate on the concept of industrial heritage.

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