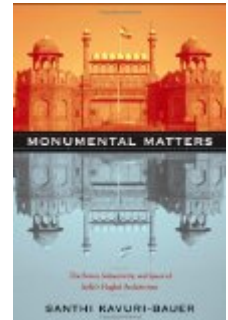


Santhi Kavuri-Bauer. *Monumental Matters: The Power, Subjectivity, and Space of India's Mughal Architecture.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. x + 216 pp. \$23.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8223-4922-8.



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Published on H-Asia (November, 2013)

Commissioned by Sumit Guha (The University of Texas at Austin)

Santhi Kavuri-Bauer has written an often lyrical analysis of the shifting meanings of monumental architecture in northern India. Asserting that “monumental environments materialize power relations, influence the social ordering of a nation, produce us as subjects, and finally, and more positively, provide us with a critical space to create, resist, and endure in our everyday lives,” Kavuri-Bauer deploys evidence from the literary to the psychoanalytical to demonstrate the contributions of Mughal architecture to the developing political and social orders (p. 2). Structured by the author’s engagement with Foucault’s construction of power relations, Lacan’s expansion on Freudian psychoanalysis, and Lefebvre’s theories on spatiality and monumentality, this wide-ranging volume covers more than two centuries of history centered on the urban living experience(s) of the Indian Muslim.

A great deal of this project focuses not on Mughal monuments as physical objects, but on their representation and idealization in literature, art, and politics. This is made clear in the opening

chapter, in which Kavuri-Bauer deploys the tools of literary and art historical analysis to clarify the role of Mughal monuments in late eighteenth-century India. Kavuri-Bauer’s dilation on the *shahrashob*, or the “lament of the fallen city,” represents a fresh approach to analysis of Delhi’s monuments. It depends on a close reading of the work of Urdu poets who were forced to Lucknow during/after the numerous assaults on Delhi. The overall impression given by the poets, particularly Mir Taqi Mir and Mirza Muhammad Rafi’ Sauda, is one of decline and loss, not just of the physical city, but of the poets’ identities as Mughal subjects. Given that laments can be distorted by nostalgia, time, and distance, I was left wondering about the difference between the monument imagined from a place of exile and the monument viewed *in situ* in Delhi, but this issue was resolved somewhat in later chapters of the book.

The balance of the first chapter is a smart reading of the tensions embedded in William Hodges’s picturesque paintings of Indian urban scenery. Kavuri-Bauer argues that Hodges’s paint-

ings of the *ghats* of Benares depicted Mughal failings—the refusal to govern ethically, a reliance on war and violence, the irresponsible wielding of power. Hodge’s representations of the Aurangzeb and Gyanvapi mosques in a matrix of local (Hindu) architecture highlighted the Mughal abuse of power, but also unintentionally revealed “the truth of British colonialism: that current activities of the British, the ousting of native rulers—ultimately do not differ from those of the Muslim tyrants of the past; and that greed and ambition can be found in all people no matter their place or birth” (p. 35).

The next chapter uses the history of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), together with its shifting documentation and preservation policies, to illustrate the changing fortunes of the Mughal monument in modern (post-1857) India. Kavuri-Bauer frames this chapter with Lefebvre’s theories on spatiality and monumentality, arguing that the ASI drained the Mughal monument of its sublimity and thus its monumentality through a process of categorization and “scientific” documentation. I interpret Lefebvre a bit differently—the concretization of the site through a colonial consensus that positions the architecture as an eternal seems more in line with Lefebvre than the vanquished sublimity—but this slight disagreement does not stand in the way of appreciating Kavuri-Bauer’s argument. Ultimately, the early ASI, operating under James Burgess, turned the monument into a dispassionate object, rather than a locus of emotion, variety, or contradiction. The rationalization of architectural space was not a foregone conclusion; it was resisted in the creative interpretive work of H. B. Keith, regional director of the North West Provinces circle, and artistic inclinations of H. H. Cole, curator of Indian monuments. The two sides of the battle between Eros (subjective emotion, art) and Logos (rationality, science) undermined the ASI as an institution, creating an opening for Lord Curzon, viceroy of India, to use the Mughal monument to justify British control over the subcontinent. Cur-

zon’s ASI recognized and embraced the monument’s capacity for the sublime, attempting to co-opt the “aura and mystique of the Mughals” into the discourse of British power (p. 70). For example, Curzon’s clearing of the parterres and environs of the Taj Mahal forced the creation of a hybrid space. The emotions evoked by the architecture and gardens could no longer be read as exclusively Mughal, Islamic, or Indian, but owed their existence to British restructuring. This late colonial intervention at the Taj Mahal was a pivotal moment for that monument’s continued existence, and Kavuri-Bauer’s assessment of Curzon’s motivations and the outcome is one of the book’s significant contributions to heritage discourse.

Chapter 3 builds on Curzon’s attempts to harness the monument’s sublimity to explicate the fraught relationship between British tourism and Indian architecture. For the tourist, monuments such as the Taj Mahal, “restored” according to Curzon’s guidelines, “operated on three registers: they affirmed the subject as a subject of imperial power, they subjected the tourist to the desires of India, and they also brought the subject into contact with the Real” (p. 78). British tourists followed an agenda set by a guidebook that encouraged them to identify with the ruling, improving class. At the same time, this impression was marred by a sense of loss, as the pastoral scenery, the romantic ruins, were defiled by modern incursions (railways, machinery). No landscape in India was immediately transparent, as the ancient vied with the new, contributing to “the unease that rests at the core of every touristic experience” (p. 81). This landscape, while unsettling to the imperial subject, offered a multiplicity of narratives to a local audience. Kavuri-Bauer nicely turns the corner at the end of the chapter, moving from the British touristic experience to the Indian, identifying components of the monumental landscape available for absorption into a burgeoning nationalist narrative.

Chapter 4 covers a wide sweep of Indian history, taking the reader from the 1857 Uprising to Partition in 1947. Kavuri-Bauer's argument follows the contours of Delhi's landscape, from the lived/historic spaces described by Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan in his *Athar al-sanadid* (a title she translates as "Works of the nobles"), through re-ordered urban space under British surveillance, to the socially/psychologically empty spaces on the eve of Partition. The 1857 Uprising and the subsequent clearing of Delhi literally and figuratively demolished Muslim social space in the city. In years following the Uprising, the mosque and *madrasa*, once marked as public, were emptied and recoded as private, leaving the Muslim community, returned to Delhi after the British clearing of the city, with no public identity. Kavuri-Bauer analyzes attempts to reclaim two mosques--the Jama and the Fatehpuri Masjids--as resistance to this silencing, but also as a means of demonstrating the community's ability to responsibly govern a site and community (as demanded by the colonial government). Kavuri-Bauer argues that the production of a stewardship plan represented the first step toward an independent political identity for the Muslims of Delhi, an identity attuned not to the history of India, but to a broader Muslim cosmology oriented toward Mecca.

The successful reclamation and governance of the Delhi mosques in the first decades of the twentieth century marked the beginning of the transformation of the mosque as a "local place of worship into a national space for the formation of a Muslim community" (p. 115). But while the mosque remained the preeminent space of Indian Muslim identity, the *Mughal* mosque was devalued in the first half of the twentieth century because of its taint of hybridity. The physical form of the Mughal mosque and the religious rituals practiced within it were viewed as a result of accretion, a mixing of Hindu form and practice with Islamic. The hybrid Mughal mosque was emblematic of decline (and here Kavuri-Bauer returns us to the themes of decline and loss featured in the first

chapter) and functioned as the negative example of Indian culture in a nationalist era. Pakistan as an imagined ideal promised to lift the Indian Muslim out of that decline, free him from the degrading influence of the local, and bond him with the communal/national. Pakistan as a lived, post-Partition reality shattered the Muslim sense of place, however, as it forced a migration away from the local into new, unfamiliar spaces.

Chapter 5 is a brief discussion of the interlude between imperial and independent India. The chapter opens with a short analysis of Mir Ali's novel *Twilight in Delhi* (1940), a lyrical lament for the disappearing Muslim culture of Old Delhi, observed by Ali and verbalized by his protagonist, Mir Nihal. Nihal is dismayed and confused by changes made to the city's changing physical environment (even more so by its changing moral climate), but according to Kavuri-Bauer, others saw those changes as an opportunity. On the eve of Independence, India's new rulers were engaged with Delhi's shifting spaces in an effort to co-opt them to their fight for a unified nation. This unity was undermined by the migration of Hindu and Muslim populations across the new border; the violence surrounding the movement and the settling of thousands of Muslims in refugee camps in the Mughal monuments in Delhi emphasized the fracturing of the national citizenry. In the face of this human disaster, India's leaders backed away from their characterizations of Mughal monuments as Islamic spaces and attempted to fold them into a pan-Indian Hindu narrative of assimilation. Nehru and Gandhi began to invest Delhi's Islamic monuments--the Jama Masjid, Red Fort, Purana Qila--with new meaning, describing them as sites of previous conflict (imperial, communal) that resulted in an even stronger unity. As Kavuri-Bauer points out, Gandhi's success in bringing Mughal monuments and Islam back into the national fold contributed to his assassination--Hindu nationalists, threatened by Gandhi's intercommunal efforts, resorted to more violence.

In the final chapter of the book, Kavuri-Bauer asks how heritage and tourism contribute to the post-Partition construction of an incontestable national narrative of secular unity (p. 147). In late Modern India, the Mughal monument was interpreted as a (Nehruvian) national monument, emblematic of his “unity in diversity” campaign. At the same time, the monument was caught up in the push for development, originally in the context of the Five-Year Plans, later as part of an exploitative neoliberal economy. Using the failure of the Taj Corridor Project as an example, Kavuri-Bauer highlights the precarious situation of the monument today. Unchecked development efforts have had negative economic and physical consequences, this at a time when heritage is not simply a matter of concern for the local population or the state, but for supranational organizations (UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee in particular). While much of this book is aimed at a specialist audience already acquainted with the nature and history of Mughal architecture, this chapter can (and should) be read by those working in cultural heritage management, regardless of their geographic area of interest.

The book concludes with a short epilogue, fronted by an interview with Chandni Chowk resident, Mr. Muslim Ahmad. Charged by family to remember the history of Delhi and Fatehpuri Masjid, Mr. Ahmad understands the Mughal monument as a symbol of loss. In his estimation, the Muslims in his neighborhood—in his nation—do not remember their history and do not understand their architecture. According to Mr. Ahmad, “the [Muslim] nation is sleeping, with no eyesight...The whole Muslim society is demoralized, illiterate, uncivilized. Every shortcoming in life, you will find in Muslims in India nowadays” (p. 171). Kavuri-Bauer uses this lament to demonstrate that Fatehpuri Masjid, once a major monument, now functions as an isolated mosque, cut off from its history and possibly, its future. In Old Delhi, we have returned to grief and mourning. The Mughal monument seems to have an infinite

capacity for the negative affect: loss, degradation, isolation.

Like many recent histories of urban India, *Monumental Matters* hovers at the intersection of multiple disciplines. Kavuri-Bauer’s use of literary analysis makes this study unique, however. In this study, the Mughal monument, built of stone, lime, and plaster, becomes almost ethereal, in that the image of the monument carried more weight than the building itself. I would welcome an expansion of this book in terms of the material nature of the Mughal monument—of what does a monument consist? At what scale is it most effective/affective? Is it a building, a neighborhood, or a city? Kavuri-Bauer implies that it is all of the above, but given the intersection of her work with heritage/tourism discourse, it might be useful to hear more about boundaries and the material world. As it stands, however, this is an unusual book, one challenging in its multidisciplinary approach and rewarding in its theoretical sophistication.

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Citation: Susan Johnson-Roehr. Review of Kavuri-Bauer, Santhi. *Monumental Matters: The Power, Subjectivity, and Space of India's Mughal Architecture*. H-Asia, H-Net Reviews. November, 2013.

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