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The politics of work, restoration and imperialism at the Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata

The legacy of imperialism at the Victoria Memorial Hall in Kolkata is unmistakable. Although the statue of its founder, the Viceroy Curzon, has been removed from the entrance, a huge bronze of Queen Victoria, Empress of India still sits in front of this massive white marble edifice. Imposing statues of dead British commanders stand in the grounds; General Outram is depicted mounted on his rearing horse, while a sculpture of Victory revolves on the summit of the building. The scene bears witness to the might and the self-aggrandisement of the British Raj in India, as indeed it was intended to. Yet the image of the Memorial is not necessarily consonant with practice therein. This paper examines the disparity between the imperial spectacle of the Memorial and how imperialism *now* impacts upon institutional practice.

A recent British-run restoration project that prompted accusations of imperialism from Victoria Memorial employees, state officials and the national government forms the focus of this article. What emerges from interviews with staff, trustees, British restorers, and Kolkata heritage organisations is that the legacy of imperialism was not so much endured by Memorial staff as actively utilized against the restoration project and against other in-house employees. As the interviews here demonstrate, museum practice at the Memorial presents a very different version of imperialism to that on display.¹

The employee's strategic use of the Memorial's imperialist past is not, however, without its compromises. A closer investigation into *why* the restoration project was being resisted reveals a complex set of interests and anxieties that have more to do with the current organisational structure of the Memorial than with the legacies of a past empire. In turn, the connections between existing power structures and modes of resistance at the Memorial raise serious questions about the privileging of anti-institutional resistance within museum and post-colonial studies.

Building Nation and Empire at the Victoria Memorial

In order to appreciate why accusations of imperialism became such potent strategic devices at the Victoria Memorial Hall it is important to know something of the specific history of the institution. The Victoria Memorial Hall was proposed in 1901 as a way to embody the achievements of the British Empire and India's place within it. Ostensibly a national memorial to Queen Victoria, the Hall was a deliberate and highly political exercise in nation and empire building.

Reflecting on his plans for the Victoria Memorial Hall, its founder Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India wrote that 'the Victorian Era in particular has witnessed the growth of India from a scattered complex of heterogeneous states and territories into a powerful and consolidated Empire'². According to Curzon, India's transition from disparate states into a coherent nation demonstrated the legitimacy and benefits of British rule. At the same time however, it was crucial to the success of the Victoria Memorial and for the British administration more generally that national unity was coupled with loyalty to the empire.

Although the British prided themselves on the creation of India as a nation, it was imperative that this nation remained within the parameters of British rule. Although the prospect of armed resistance and the campaign for home rule had not yet begun, in 1901 nationalism was fast becoming a central theme of Bengali culture. The writers and artists of the Bengali Renaissance were drawing on traditional imagery as a means of developing a modern Indian work and identity while at a national level, individuals within the Congress Party were fighting for parity with British citizens and greater representation in government³. In this context the celebration of nationhood was potentially problematic for the British. India's status as a nation effectively endorsed British rule, but Indian nationalism could potentially unbalance it.

The Victoria Memorial Hall's collections were explicitly planned to construct the required intersection of nation and empire. With more than a passing nod to the Bengali Renaissance and cultural nationalism, Curzon announced that the eminent figures of Indian history, even if they had not supported the British, should be included within the Memorial's displays. Anyone of exceptional importance, whatever their creed, race or political affiliation should be documented within these hallowed halls. The Victoria

Memorial Hall collections thus responded to a newly espoused version of Indian national identity.

This inculcation of pride in Indian history was, however, carefully situated. The exhibitions were not meant to present a narrative 'of conquest or subjection', rather to propose 'an equal heritage in a common glory'.⁴ Under the guise of parity specifically Indian achievements or histories would in effect be subsumed within this apparently shared heritage. As Curzon noted, 'if I put Sivaji into the same fabric as Warren Hastings, I do not injure the fame of Warren Hastings, but I take the sting out of Sivaji.'⁵ The assimilation and re-presentation of Indian history actually neutered it as a force to be reckoned with for it re-inscribed nationalist feeling as part of a shared history and as synonymous with the British Empire.

The architecture of the Memorial was similarly strategic. Marble for the Memorial was quarried from the same source used for the Taj Mahal and was likewise constructed on a massive raised platform. In combination with the collections, which begin with the demise of Mughal rule, the architectural references implied that the British were the logical inheritors of the previous empire in India.

Despite his careful planning, when the VICTORIA MEMORIAL HALL opened in 1921, Curzon's vision was not entirely realised. The collections were oriented towards a British history and Indian dignitaries were markedly under-represented. Perhaps more importantly the success of the Memorial was undermined by wider political events. Peaceful and armed resistance to Curzon's rule and to the 1905 Partition in particular, prompted the British to move their capital from Kolkata to Delhi, thus throwing doubt on the Memorial's capacity to represent the irrevocable might of the British empire. Even as it opened the Memorial was recognised as an anachronism, quite literally, a memorial to the British Empire which was already tangibly in decline.

Curzon come again?

Given the historical context of the Victoria Memorial Hall, it is perhaps little wonder that the planned restoration of its British collection met with some censure, prompting comments that ‘Curzon had come again’.⁶ The restoration project in question was set up in 1989 by the British-based Calcutta Tercentenary Trust (CTT) with the aim of restoring the remarkable holdings of artwork made by European artists in India. The CTT ascribed the poor condition of the paintings to a lack of funds and expertise, both of which they aimed at providing. Supported by the secretary-curator of the Memorial and local government, the CTT paid for experienced western conservators to work on restoration and to train staff at the Memorial⁷. Yet, despite this apparently benevolent intention the project was met with extensive resistance and was intermittently blocked at various levels throughout its twelve-year duration. As a result the paper and painting restoration ran four years late while the gallery space intended for the restored paintings still awaits repair.

From the outset of the CTT project criticisms concerning imperialism were registered at a number of levels. Delhi based politicians and museum curators protested that the CTT’s plans were a ‘blow to nationalism’ and that the British were interfering; comments that were taken sufficiently seriously to reach the ears of the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.⁸ Although these doubts were later assuaged through the intervention of friends and colleagues in high places, concerns about imperialism continued to be voiced.

According to a wide range of people including Memorial staff and, later, CTT restorers, the management of the restoration had been imperialist. The philanthropic aim of providing the very best for the Memorial was understood as being prejudicial to Indian skills, since in using western rather than Indian restorers the CTT presupposed the superiority of western expertise⁹. Similarly, in order to ensure excellence, much of the equipment and materials, even cotton-wool, required by the restoration project was imported, creating an unsustainable reliance upon the west¹⁰. The fact that the project remained London-based also provoked disapprobation as did the CTT’s automatic assumption of authority, their attitude and lack of sensitivity towards Indian restorers¹¹.

Other aspects of the project further exacerbated criticisms. The restorers were working exclusively on paintings made by European artists that were later donated to the Victoria

Memorial or bought by the Trustees to create a history of Empire. Notably, the restoration project did not include works made by Indian artists that were equally in need of restoration, a decision that provoked questions as to whose heritage was being restored.

Various reasons were given for why the decision to concentrate on the European paintings was made. The then secretary-curator commented that he had not wanted the CTT to work on the Indian collection since it required very different expertise while, in contrast, a CTT restorer maintained that the restoration of Indian art, particularly popular art, had been considered beneath the attentions of the project¹². Indeed, the restoration as a whole had been premised on a very particular artistic hierarchy. The priority of the project had been to restore artwork by eminent European artists such as Tilly Kettle, Johann Zoffany, William Hodges, Thomas and William Daniells and, as one of the CTT founder members said, ‘it never occurred (to us) to look at other areas’¹³. Effectively, the restoration privileged the great masters, a European canon and a correlative Eurocentric value-system.

Yet in other ways the decision to work on European paintings was much less clear cut. The CTT had been encouraged to concentrate in the area of British artists by the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) and indeed some of the work intended for restoration was already prominently on display. The CTT thus consolidated and perpetuated rather than established an emphasis on a European canon and did so with at least some support from Indian authorities.

Moreover, while the Memorial and the collection of paintings by European artists *is* to a large extent the legacy of the British Empire, any conclusion that its restoration is simply an imperialist gesture, negates the complexities of a hybrid heritage. The collections are now an element of cultural life in contemporary Kolkata and are not somehow ensconced in a time warp of Empire. Even at its inception many Indians supported the Memorial and gave generously to it, and indeed the collected work by European artists was commissioned and bought by Indian as well as by European patrons¹⁴. The artwork by the European artists in India not only belongs to a western tradition but, whether for good or bad, has been part of the history of art in India.¹⁵

Criticisms concerning imperialism were undoubtedly justified in some respects but it is also important to note that there was no consensus on what imperialism actually entailed. At the Memorial imperialism was not understood in any homogenous sense, rather it included a whole range of issues, actions and events occurring at any point over the last two centuries. Instead of referring to a specific set of historic or political relations imperialism was a general term that spoke of distrust and the possibility of foreign oppression in whatever guise. Yet significantly, the amorphous nature of the term did not undermine its efficacy. On the contrary, the specific histories of the Victoria Memorial ensured that claims concerning imperialism would receive attention at the highest levels – even from the prime-minister. It was this guarantee of attention that made anti-imperialist rhetoric an extremely valuable tool within the institution at any number of levels.

For instance, the CTT recommendations for the re-organisation of floor cleaning proved to be unpopular with the unions. While complaints about cleaning protocol might pass unheard, people would, and did listen to the claim that the new cleaning regime was an example of foreign oppression.¹⁶ Allegations of imperialism, precisely because their ideological weight was beyond question, validated resistance and thereby enabled it.

In this context imperialism was a way of creating institutional leverage and not something that was passively endured or actively resisted. The diversity of complaints concerning imperialism was not indicative of their vagueness or inconsequence, rather of how potent the term was in a strategic context. Importantly, however, staff were not resisting imperialism per se, they were using anti-imperialist rhetoric as *the means* of resistance.

Considering the use of imperialism as a strategy by no means negates its verity, indeed such claims are only possible because they have a truth-value, but it does change the focus of enquiry. Instead of focusing on whether the project was imperialist, or if such claims were legitimate, it places emphasis upon why such claims were made in the first place. What then was at stake for Memorial staff in the CTT project and what exactly did they want to resist?

The stakes of disrepair and resistance

There is nothing unusual in Indian institutions receiving funds from the west. The Victoria Memorial had previously accepted grants to help restoration and as the secretary-curator in post at the beginning of the CTT project remarked, 'the government doesn't have the money for restoration and we accept all kinds of foreign aid here'.¹⁷ Significantly, however, the CTT did not simply fund-raise but sent recognised experts to work at the Memorial for two month stints each year. The fact that the CTT restorers were physically present at the Memorial lay at the heart of the opposition.

The restoration unit at the Victoria Memorial had been well known, with its head publishing a book on conservation and restoration in India and regularly advising other institutions on good practice. At the same time the collection was actually in very bad condition. The then secretary-curator commented that 'things in stores were rotting and the documentation was terrible', sentiments echoed by the press.¹⁸ The arrival of the CTT meant that the poor state of the collection would be further revealed, and this time to international experts, as would the restoration unit's inability to adequately care for the collection. The CTT project therefore threatened to discredit the existing restoration unit and displace them as the authorities on restoration within the Memorial if not in West Bengal as a whole.¹⁹

The arrival of the CTT had serious repercussions upon the status of some restorers at the Memorial, but there were different issues at stake for other employees, most notably the secretary-curator. The director who had instigated the project had commented that the CTT 'weren't telling me how to keep a museum, they just knew more about restoration than I did', but his successor inherited a more difficult situation.²⁰ Not only were some of the restoration staff antagonistic to the CTT but there was a lack of sympathy for the project at a State level, not least because the Communist led, Left Front government had been in power since 1977.²¹ In addition, the project had originally been an informal agreement so when the present secretary-curator arrived there was no paperwork, contractual obligations or formal structure to underpin the parameters of the project.

Perhaps most significantly for the curator, however, was that the way in which the CTT approached the project qualitatively changed when the restoration team began work. While the CTT organisers had initiated the project with the wellbeing of the European

paintings firmly in mind, the restorers saw the project in holistic rather than in technical terms. Once they began to think about preventive conservation, the restorers necessarily had to consider the way in which the Memorial was run as a whole and began to call for extensive changes in practice. In effect, the CTT *were* telling the secretary-curator how to run a museum. Like some of the restoration staff, the secretary-curator saw his expertise and authority undermined by the CTT project.²²

Thus, the use of anti-imperialist rhetoric as a means of resisting the CTT restoration was primarily a form of self-protection. Yet, it remains to be asked: why had the collections initially fallen into such a bad state of disrepair and made self-protection necessary in the first place?

The ostensible reason for the poor state of the collection was environmental and architectural. The Kolkata climate is hot and humid; temperatures climb to forty degrees centigrade in summer and the monsoon creates humidity levels of up to 95%. There is also a high degree of air pollution and bright light, all of which can be damaging to artwork. These factors are to some extent mitigated by the structure of the Memorial itself; the white marble facing modifies the extremes of temperature while the open halls and corridors enable additional air-flow. Simultaneously, however, the open structure and poor repair of the building admits birds whose droppings corrode the varnish and paint, while also giving sustenance to other pests such as cockroaches. The level of decrepitude is also, however, closely connected to the patterns of work within the institution.

Kolkata has a history of strong trade union representation and at the Memorial there are five separate unions who exert varying degrees of institutional influence. One sphere of influence is that of appointments, and people are sometimes employed because of their links to the unions or to people already in position rather than because of any particular fitness for the post. For example, despite the massive graduate workforce in India, the English language based archive, library and documentation centre at the Memorial employs staff who cannot read or write English. Although their duties may be primarily fetching, carrying and reshelving it is unsurprising that documents go missing if staff cannot read what they contain.²³ Similarly, new restorers have been known to come directly from the gardening staff.²⁴ Although people without any prior training do on

occasion excel in their new roles, this form of cronyism has had a massive impact upon the standards of work within the institution. Not only are people sometimes unqualified, but there is insufficient opportunity for them to benefit from training. Furthermore, incompetent practice is often concealed in the interests of self-preservation and some of the more unproductive staff have reportedly lost or blurred records so as to cover previous mistakes or lack of work, thus exacerbating the existing problem.²⁵ This subterfuge is unsurprising given both the lack of up-to-date training and the realities of living in a city with virtually no social security.

Resisting union influence is potentially suicidal for senior management. In the past attempts to rectify poor standards of work or to implement unwelcome staff changes have resulted in extreme disputes. More than one secretary-curator has fallen prey to gheraoing, that is, when employees effectively prevent management from working by occupying their office, not answering telephone calls, not delivering the post or not opening doors. Cumulatively such minor refusals to cooperate can shut down an institution and immense union power is wielded through control over the smallest details.

While the unions have on the one hand contributed to many people having jobs for which they are consummately unqualified, on the other hand the trade unions at the Memorial have made concerted protests about some of the appalling conditions of employment, particularly that of casual labour.²⁶ People working on a casual basis are extremely lowly paid although they often have skilled or responsible jobs. Highly regarded restorers who have been working at the Memorial for several years are still paid less than the sweepers who are on permanent contracts. At worst this results in a deeply demotivating situation where competent staff will be working for a fraction of the pay that their colleagues receive²⁷.

With such patterns of employment it is perhaps inevitable that the collections are managed badly. The combination of difficult climactic conditions with poorly motivated, incompetent or recalcitrant staff results in a situation where there is inadequate documentation, where documentation goes missing and where artwork decays. To a large extent, this is not the fault of the staff but is a product of the institutional structure. Nevertheless, the fact is that the inadequate collections management created a dynamic of

its own. These conditions of employment and structures of organisation led directly to the involvement of the CTT. Simultaneously however, the same institutional structures enabled resistance to the CTT restoration.

Superficially, employees at the Memorial do not have a great deal of power since all queries are channeled through the secretary-curator who then issues directives. Rather than the Librarian admitting visitors to work in the library, for instance, or the Head Archivist giving license for researchers to use the archives, each request to study must be referred upwards. Permission is not an automatic right or transparent process. Yet although many of the Memorial employees are not given the responsibility to take the decisions that affect them, they do have the ability to foil orders from above. If, for example, the CTT needed artwork to be photographed but the person who was responsible for carrying paintings from one floor to the next is 'ill', or the keys to the photography stores go 'missing', then work could be halted for days or even weeks on end.

At a more senior level paperwork could disappear or simple prevarication could hold the restorers up. Moreover, the system of having to refer upwards could be used to staff advantage. For example, although permission to use the archive may have been already issued, staff could later demand that further permission be obtained for particular items thereby instigating an interminable cycle of repeatedly seeking permission from above. Likewise, the secretary-curator who answers on the one hand to central government in Delhi and on the other to the Board of Trustees could use methods of repetitively referring decisions upwards to senior authorities.

These strategies of resistance were a highly effective way of exploiting the specific structure of a particular organisation. Denied power over their own role, department or even institution, staff could resist decisions that potentially undermined their position and which could not be stopped using more legitimate methods. As one restorer recalled:

The secretary-curator was scared to make any decisions because he didn't really want these foreigners working in his institution and he didn't really have the necessary position or power to be able to do anything with it so he just stalled and didn't make any decisions and the thing just ground to a halt²⁸.

Precisely because passive resistance worked within institutional gaps, it was a highly effective strategy. Since the Memorial has no clear regulations on access or other issues it is impossible to refute the demand for more detailed permission or for further paperwork. Equally, if it is unclear who exactly is responsible for, say, a particular set of keys, it is almost impossible to prove whether or not they are lost or 'missing' and so on. Ultimately, it remained unclear which problems were due to labyrinthine institutional procedure, which to simple mistakes and which were deliberately contrived. This play in the structure of the Memorial effectively rendered resistant staff immune to any kind of accusation or reproof.

Overall, then, the same structures that enabled Memorial staff to resist the CTT were exactly those that had originally led to the poor condition of the collections and may lead to their future deterioration. Moreover, the organisation of the Memorial actually made strategies of resistance necessary. Notably, this distribution of power within the Memorial was a commonplace means of checking mistakes or the abuse of autonomy lower down the (Indian) ranks within colonial bureaucracies. Yet by deliberately disenfranchising its staff, this top-heavy management style forced staff to find surreptitious ways of avoiding unwelcome decisions made on their behalf. Apparent checks on insurgency or idiosyncratic behavior thereby contributed to the reproduction of the very problems it was designed to solve.

The use of these strategies to resist the CTT was not, therefore a simple response to an imperialist organisation displacing the authority of the Indian staff. Rather, these strategies substantially predated the CTT and were one of the only means for staff to establish any kind of control within the institution. Even before the CTT arrived, staff authority was seriously in question and the project was resisted not because it usurped control but because it revealed a lack of control that was symptomatic of an already dysfunctional organisation.

The shortcomings of resistance

Standing outside the Victoria Memorial Hallor visiting the galleries, a passing art historian could easily draw conclusions about the near hegemony of empire and the

continuing need to deal with the legacies of imperialism at the Memorial. Despite the image of empire that the Memorial presents, however, an analysis of the micro-political sphere of the Memorial reveals a political engagement, particularly with questions of imperialism, which is markedly different to that on display since the employees are acutely aware of how imperialism can be reworked combatively. Yet, although the dynamic use of imperialism does form a stark contrast to the spectacle of imperialism at the Memorial, the possibility of the former remains dependent upon the latter. It is precisely because the legacy of empire is so evident and so over-determined at the Memorial, that employees can capitalise upon its specific history to create leverage within the institution. At the same time, however, imperialism is not itself resisted since the discourse of imperialism forms the *mode* of resistance rather than necessarily being the actual *object* of resistance. The specific implementation of anti-imperialist leverage at the Memorial does, however, have further repercussions for art history and museum studies in that it raises wider questions about the merits of resistance.

Academics writing in areas such as post-colonialism, feminism and the social history of art have built on Marxism to equate critical thought with resistance to established hegemonies. Academics have often applauded events or individuals that threaten dominant and exclusive discourses or oppressive institutions. Initially conceived of as opposition, resistance was gradually rethought in terms of intervention, of working in and exploiting the gaps and elisions of institutional power. At the Memorial, in contrast to received and valorised models, resistance is not exerted from the margins against the centre but similar strategies are used across the board; the museum elite utilise much the same techniques to preserve their territory as the sweepers. Although ostensibly in control the secretary-curator can be as subject to the sweeper's actions as vice-versa. Power in this context is not primarily located in the centre and equally resistance cannot be claimed as an exclusively marginal strategy. In addition, rather than resistance being primarily ideological or anti-authoritarian, it is more concerned with carving out individual territory and control in an economic and political climate where careers are not principally a matter of status. Resistance, here, is primarily concerned with self, rather than social interest.

While these strategies of resistance are useful for individuals in the short term, however, this attempt to retain some degree of autonomy actually perpetuates the fissures and problems of the institution. Although the term imperialism is used dynamically, its effects are often to prevent rather than to enable change. Resistance here does not create a space for different and potentially more equitable working patterns, or for greater access to the collections but aims at stasis. As is evident here, however, this preservation of the status-quo requires a massive exertion of energy, active protest and strategy; in effect, resistance constitutes a dynamic attempt to remain the same. Staff at the Memorial *are* subject to unjust and frustrating conditions of employment within a wider and harsh economic environment and these strategies might appear to be their only option. Nevertheless, the practice and objects of resistance at the Victoria Memorial Hall actually perpetuate an injurious structure and do not provide any motor for emancipatory change.

¹ All interviews were conducted on record although certain comments were not recorded upon request. As certain material could potentially have adverse affects upon the respondent's professional lives, particularly those of the more junior Indian staff at the Memorial, interviews are indexed by date and institutional affiliation. Where essential to the argument the position of individual interviews is mentioned in the text. I would like to thank all the interview respondents for their time and candour.

² Lord Curzon, 'The Victoria Memorial Hall', *British Government in India: The story of the Viceroy's and Government Houses*, Cassell and Company, London, 1925 p. 179.

³ For a detailed account of the rise of nationalism in Bengal see Marcus F. Franda, *Radical Politics in West Bengal*, The M.I.T. Press, Cambridge Mass. And London, 1971 and J.H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth Century Bengal*, University of California press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968. Partha Mitter, XXXXX

⁴ Lord Curzon, letter to Mr. Morley 14th August 1907, Curzon Collection MSS. EUR.F.111.458a.

⁵ Lord Curzon, Response to Lyall 22nd May 1901. Curzon Collection MSS. EUR.F.111.458b.

⁶ Interview: Kolkata academic 18/04/01

⁷ Each year conservators worked for a two month period between November and February with a project leader staying the full four months. Up to nine restorers were working in any one period.

⁸ Interviews: Victoria Memorial (VM) staff 13/04/01, 14/04/01 CTT staff 15/03/01

⁹ Interview: Kolkata Heritage organisation staff 25/04/01. One of the CTT founders, however, pointed out that as individual restorers do not work on the same piece from beginning to end it is important that the whole team approach restoration with the same methods and standards. This standardisation is guaranteed if everyone comes from the same background (interview: CTT staff 04/10/01). Nevertheless, many Indian restorers have studied in Europe and standardisation could perhaps have been established through a more extensive on-site training programme. The INTACH 'Preservation of Art Objects' course which was run at the Birla Academy in Kolkata in

January 1994 at Kala Bhavana in 1996 demonstrate that a training programme was entirely feasible.

¹⁰ Interview: CTT staff 3/04/01

¹¹ Interviews: CTT staff 29/03/01 VM staff 11/ 04/ 01, 13/04/01, 14/04/01, 19/04/01

¹² Interviews: VM staff 13/04/01, 14/04/01 CTT staff 3/04/01.

¹³ Interview: CTT staff 15/03/01

¹⁴ Interview: VM trustee 20/04/01. See also Lord Curzon ‘Lecture to Asiatic Society of Bengal’, February 26th 1901, in Thomas Raleigh (ed.) *Lord Curzon in India: Being a Selection from his Speeches as Viceroy and Governor General of India 1898-1905*, Macmillan and Co., London, 1906.

¹⁵ The hybridity of Kolkatan life is implicitly acknowledged in the Calcutta Gallery (1992) where European paintings, company paintings and Indian popular art are all displayed alongside each other.

¹⁶ Interview: CTT staff: 3/04/01

¹⁷ Interview: VM staff: 13/04/01

¹⁸ Interview: VM staff 13/04/01, 14/04/01 Staff from within the Memorial had also formally complained to the Ministry of Culture about the poor condition of the work, Interview: VM staff 18/04/01.

¹⁹ The CTT restorers were on occasion seen as usurping other people’s roles at both a manual and later a management level. For example, a Memorial employee is assigned to lift artwork and on one occasion work was almost stopped when it transpired CTT restorers had lifted artwork themselves. If the ‘lifter’ is not immediately available then it is easy to see why the CTT would move paintings themselves and continue working, yet when someone’s only area of control or responsibility is lifting, then it is also understandable if objections are made, particularly when employment is not always secure. Interviews: CTT staff 29/03/01, 29/03/01(B).

²⁰ Interviews: VM staff: 11/ 04/ 01, 13/04/01.

²¹ The Memorial is directly affected by the political landscape of West Bengal since the State Governor is the de facto head of the Board of Trustees at the Memorial. While he is not necessarily affiliated to the Left Front government he inevitably engages with that wider political terrain. At the beginning of the project the Governor in post had been in favour of the CTT restoration, successive Governors were somewhat less enamoured of it and the recent completion of painting restoration has been attributed to a further change in personnel.

²² Interviews: VM staff: 11/ 04/ 01, 13/04/01.

²³ For instance, the Memorial staff are currently unable to locate any Minutes of the Board of Trustees previous of 1979.

²⁴ Interview: CTT staff 29/03/01

²⁵ Interview: VM staff: 11/ 04/ 01.

²⁶ At the Victoria Memorial the Communist Party India – Marxist (CPI-M), the Communist Party India (CPI) Congress, Trinamul and the Scheduled Caste/ Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) trade unions are all represented.

²⁷ Potentially restoration staff are further demotivated because the paintings that they work on are rarely seen. The Victoria Memorial holdings includes one of the world’s best collections of European artists working in India but it also contains an impressive array of Company paintings, Mughal artwork, contemporary Indian art and archival material from 1700 to 1900. Still with the exception of the exemplary Calcutta gallery, the exhibitions have remained relatively unchanged and large sections of the collection remain in storage. Before the recent show of restored work some of the European paintings, one of the Memorials greatest assets had remained out of sight for decades.

²⁸ Interview: CTT staff 20/02/01