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# Undoing Empire: Rereading the Destruction of India's Baghs

THERE IS THE GOVERNMENT OF THE ENGLISH IN THE CITY.  
EVERYWHERE IS THE CRY OF "HELP US, SAVE US." [1]

On January 16, 1857, the newspaper *Tilism* reported the administrative changes in Lucknow, then the capital of Awadh in present-day northern India, and their impact on the city after the British East India Company deposed its last king, Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, in 1856.[2] Shortly after the report, Indian cities and towns, including Delhi, Lucknow, and Jhansi, rose up in revolt,[3] due to the clashing interests of authorities and residents over the East India Company's colonial agenda and accession on behalf of the British Crown.[4] The uprising was the result of mounting grievances, including the East India Company's policies of usurping kingdoms and deposing the local elite, fear of forceful conversion to Christianity,[5] loss of trade in some British-occupied territories,[6] differential treatment of *sepoys*—native soldiers serving the British—and peasants' discontent in the face of landlordism and foreign imperialism.[7] The uprising began on May 10, 1857, in Meerut, a British cantonment north of Delhi, due to suspicions among *sepoys* that paper bullet cartridges were being soaked in cow and pork fat to keep them dry—thus the common practice of biting the cartridges to open them would constitute a religious violation for Hindu and Muslim soldiers.[8] The *sepoys* were soon joined by the armies of local rulers as well as peasants and prisoners; according to the historian Nayanjot Lahiri, people from across castes and creeds took part in the uprising.[9] The agitation against colonial rule, which posed a threat to British domination, spread across northern and central India but ultimately was suppressed by 1858–1859. The defeat led to further political and administrative changes across India, including the shift of authority from the East India Company to the British Imperial Government.

In this political unrest, sites such as palaces, mosques, and baghs sheltered revolutionaries and were targeted by British authorities who worked to tamp down the rebellion. These spaces—the baghs in particular—were then massively transformed in the failed revolution's wake. Baghs—landscaped spaces with housing structures and geometrically laid gardens and pathways, enclosed by walls—were primarily leisure spaces of and for the royalty and elite. Before the uprising, Lucknow had around 140 baghs, according to one archival map, and possibly up to 400, according to another source.[10] During the

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[1] *Tilism*, January 16, 1857, quoted in Iqbal Husain, "Awadh on the Eve of 1857—Evidence of the Urdu Newspaper *Tilism*," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 59 (1998): 770.

[2] Abdul Halim Shrar, *The Lucknow Omnibus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 234.

[3] The event has been framed differently according to varying points of view. It has been called the Sepoy Mutiny from the British perspective, the First War of Independence from a nationalist perspective, and everything in between!

[4] An example of the colonial interest in annexing kingdoms in India is Governor General Lord Dalhousie's statement from 1851, which described the kingdom of Awadh as "a cherry that will drop into our mouth one day." See Vijayam Sankaranarayanan, ed., *Themes in Indian History, Part III* (New Delhi: National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2011), 296.

[5] Iqbal Husain, "The Rebels' Cause in 1857—From Their Own Spokesmen," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 57 (1996): 547–555.

[6] Peter Robb, "On the Rebellion of 1857: A Brief History of an Idea," *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 19 (2007): 1696–1702.

[7] Sabyasachi Dasgupta, "The Agrarian Question: Revisiting the Sepoy Peasant Nexus in 1857," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 70 (2009): 421–426; and Eric Stokes, *The Peasant Armed: The Indian Rebellion of 1857*, ed. C. A. Bayly (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 12.

[8] Darshan Perusek, "Subaltern Consciousness and Historiography of Indian Rebellion of 1857," *Economic and Political Weekly* 28, no. 37 (1993): 1931–1936.

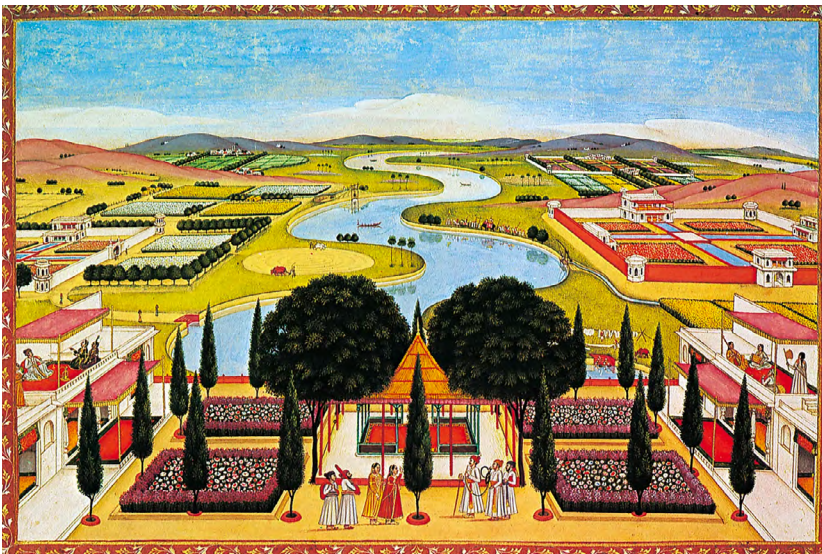
[9] Nayanjot Lahiri, "Commemorating and Remembering 1857: The Revolt in Delhi and Its Afterlife," *World Archaeology* 35, no. 1 (2003): 35–60.

[10] Anjali Singh Jaiswal, "A 'Bagh'ful of Lore!," *Times of India*, January 28, 2006, [link](#).

uprising, the baghs became strongholds of the revolutionaries, leading colonial authorities to view them with suspicion and to enforce measures to eliminate, dismantle, or reappropriate them. Tracing the legacy of baghs through both their physical transformations and their imagined ones offers a more complete history of these sites during and after the uprising.

The existing literature on baghs largely ignores their later history and instead focuses extensively on the medieval period. One scholar addressing this historiographical absence is the landscape architecture and South Asian scholar Amita Sinha, whose article “Decadence, Mourning and Revolution” closely examines the transformations to Lucknow’s baghs in relation to the 1850s uprising.[11] I extend such work by looking not only at the physical transformations of the baghs but also at how these changes were captured and circulated through different media. Tracing the legacy of baghs through their physical transformations and their imagined ones, I critique colonial historiography to present a more complete history of the baghs during and since the uprising, to problematize a singular projection of colonial history.

[11] Amita Sinha, “Decadence, Mourning and Revolution: Facets of the 19th Century Landscape of Lucknow, India,” *Landscape Research* 21, no. 2 (1996): 123–136.



Painting showing baghs lining the sides of the Gomti River in Lucknow. *Palace garden in a river landscape*, late Mughal, Oudh, c. 1785; opaque watercolor and gold on paper via Staatliche Museen zu Berlin—Preussischer Kulturbesitz.

### Baghs before the Uprising

Baghs developed under royal and elite ownership and patronage in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries as a landscape typology in North Indian cities. One of the more well-known examples is the garden complex opposite the Taj Mahal in Agra.[12] Eighteenth-century miniature paintings of baghs, such as *A Palace Complex with Harem Gardens*,[13] show cultural activities such as music and dance performances, indicating that these spaces were integral to elite social landscapes. Within their enclosure, one might find pavilions, palaces, and mosques surrounded by landscaping, with horticultural designs such as water channels, flower beds, and groves of fruit trees. Though the baghs were used primarily by their elite patrons for leisure purposes, records suggest that they were sometimes made accessible to the city’s residents.

[12] The gardens around the Taj Mahal are Mughal gardens; baghs in other places, such as in Lucknow and Rajasthan, have some different characteristics.

[13] Faiz Allah, *A Palace Complex with Harem Gardens*, c. 1765, 45.5 x 31.8 cm, The David Collection, Copenhagen.

[14] It is recorded that a larger public congregated in Aish Bagh and Goornain Bagh in Lucknow, which were noted to have staged Ramayan performances, a traditional theatrical enactment of the epic of Ramayana.[15] Thus, baghs were once important cultural fixtures not just for the elite but also for the residents of the city, an association that faded in the buildup to the uprising.

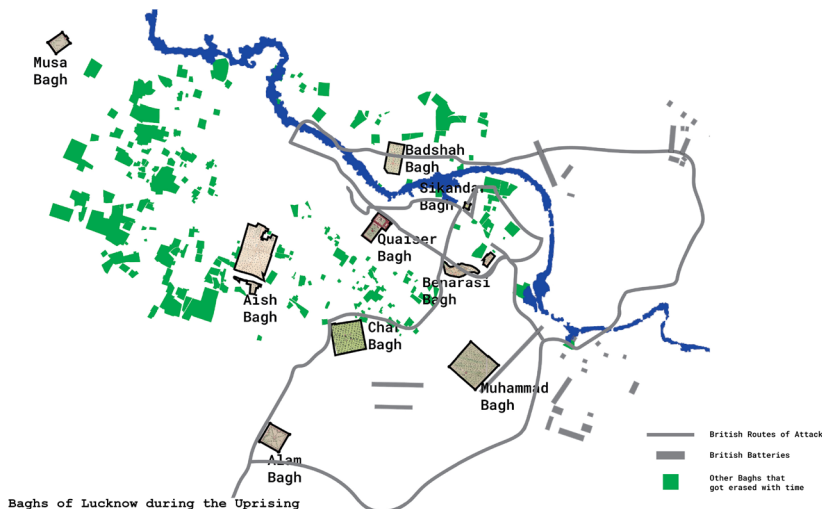
Prior to the rebellion, as British influence in northern India grew, cities experienced deteriorating conditions and population decline due to new administrative changes, leading to loss of business for Indigenous manufacturers, such as weavers.[16] In December 1856, *Tilism* reported on this shift:

LUCKNOW WAS ONCE A GARDEN THAT SAW NO AUTUMN. WHOEVER LIVED THERE WAS LIKE A NIGHTINGALE IN THE GARDEN OF FLOWERS... THE ANGELS USED TO DANCE IN ECSTASY. THESE DAYS IT APPEARS DESERTED, REMINDING ALL THAT THIS WORLD IS A PLACE OF WARNING.[17]

According to historian Roshan Taqui, who has worked extensively on Lucknow, as Lucknow was taken by the British, the upkeep of the city's many baghs sharply declined and cultural activities stopped, primarily due to loss of patronage as the native royals and elite were replaced or their authority diminished. [18] As these sites became unkempt, they were taken up by revolutionaries, and baghs transitioned from their status as jewels within a cultural landscape to strategic, defensive points in a landscape of resistance.[19]

**Conflict: Bago ki barbadi (The Destruction of Baghs)[20]**

HERE AT LUCKNOW, BUILDINGS ARE NOW AND THEN DESTROYED. ALL THE SURROUNDING GATES, AND PLASTER AND IRON STATUES OF KAISERBAGH HAVE LATELY BEEN PULLED DOWN, FOR WHAT PURPOSE IS NOT KNOWN TO THE PEOPLE. [21]



[14] Shrar, *The Lucknow Omnibus*, 85.

[15] P. C. Mookherji, *The Pictorial Lucknow* (Lucknow: N.P., 1883), 159.

[16] "Husain, "Awadh on the Eve of 1857," 769.

[17] *Tilism*, December 19, 1856, quoted in Anjum Taban Faruqi, "The Coming of the Revolt in Awadh: The Evidence of Urdu Newspapers," *Social Scientist* 26, no. 1/4 (January–April 1998): 16–24.

[18] Roshan Taqui, *1857 ke bad Lucknow ki barbadi* (2009), 29.

[19] How exactly the baghs were used by the revolutionaries is not evident in the archives I have been able to access. In the main, the archives chronicle the changes after the uprising and, in some cases, one comes across descriptions of the baghs as they were before the revolt. It is highly possible that the British did not witness how the baghs were taken over, and records by the natives, if any, may not have survived.

[20] Term borrowed from Taqui, *1857 ke bad Lucknow ki barbadi*.

Map of Lucknow, where some of the important baghs connected to the uprising have been marked and overlapped with British routes of attack and position of batteries. Courtesy of the author.



The British authorities in Lucknow suppressed the rebel forces by suppressing the sites of the revolution, constructing a military geography mapped through different mediums that focused, perhaps unsurprisingly, on the baghs, as they had been among the foremost strongholds of the rebels.

The largest number of baghs impacted by violence—such as the bombardment, cutting down, or burning of a site—were in Lucknow. Not only were these sites physically destroyed, but colonial actors, such as Lieutenant Colonel D. S. Dodgson, also made a point of illustrating these scenes of destruction, which were subsequently printed by Day & Son, lithographers to the Queen.[22] These representations created an image of the military geography, showing moving troops, batteries, bombardments, and war actions. One of these lithographs depicts an attack on Musa Bagh, located at the western end of the city. It shows two cannons being primed and muskets being fired.[23] There is dense vegetation between the British troops and the palace in the bagh, a scene that is confirmed by Taqui, who also recounts that Musa Bagh saw heavy bombardment by the British forces in March 1858.[24] In a photograph of Musa Bagh taken by the Italian British war photographer Felice Beato later in 1858, the trees in the foreground are missing, confirming the subsequent destruction of the vegetation.[25] The violence of the events led to the erasure of flower beds and fruit-bearing trees in the baghs, altering their landscapes. Other colonial archival photos of baghs from this period capture partly demolished structures, buildings with cannonball and bullet marks, and ruined and dried-up landscapes. These photographs depict a type of militarized aesthetic of colonial preparation, in this case emphasizing the damage done by the British forces and simultaneously canonizing the erasure of the landscape.



[21] Mookherji, *The Pictorial Lucknow*, 250.

[22] D. S. Dodgson, *General Views & Special Points of Interest of the City of Lucknow* (London: Day & Son, 1860).

[23] E. Walker, Moosa Bagh 1858, 1860, lithograph, in Dodgson, *General Views & Special Points of Interest of the City of Lucknow*, National Army Museum, London.

[24] Taqui, *1857 ke bad Lucknow ki barbadi*, 29.

[25] Felice Beato, *The Musabagh, Lucknow*, 1858, albumen silver print; 29.8 x 25.8 cm., Getty Museum Collection, Los Angeles.

Lithograph of Musa Bagh. Note the reconstruction of the battle depicted from an attacking British perspective, with the cannons and muskets pointed at Musa Bagh Palace. E. Walker, Moosa Bagh, Lucknow, 1860, Day & Son. Courtesy of the British Library Board [X270[27], plate 27 of 'General Views of Lucknow' by Sir DS Dodgson].

In Lucknow's Sikandar Bagh, the site of one of the fiercest battles of the uprising, archival descriptions highlight how the brick walls were very difficult for the British troops to breach and how their strength added to the strategic advantage of the revolutionaries, as they could fire at the advancing troops from atop the ramparts.[26] Defensive walls were a consistent feature

[26] George William Forrest, *A History of the Indian Mutiny 1857–58: Reviewed and Illustrated from Original Documents*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1904), 152.

of the baghs, which made them preferred sites of fortification by the revolutionaries. Once the British troops did breach the walls and entered Sikandar Bagh, they faced fire from the rebels occupying the pavilion at its center. Structures within baghs, such as palaces and pavilions, provided vantage points from where the revolutionaries could maintain sight of surrounding activities. As the British troops advanced, “the bodies [of the deceased revolutionaries] were hurled into the flower-beds below,” according to a 1904 history by the British journalist George W. Forrest.[27] A 1939 account by the British historian Sidney Hay also states the presence of flower beds in Sikandar Bagh.[28] However, as with the photos of Musa Bagh, no flowers can be seen in a photograph taken by Beato a few months after the event. By then, remnants of the landscape elements had either been erased by military actions such as bombardment during the uprising or had withered from lack of maintenance. The photographs, considered documentary evidence of the events, were in fact captured months later and show the baghs as deserted and barren, an aftermath of environmental destruction. Meanwhile, the lithographs re-created the action of battle with an element of subjectivity and artistic interpretation. Both became important tools deployed by the British to register their victory by visually recording and re-creating the conflict and its spatial consequences.

Immediately after suppressing the uprising in 1858, the British, in acts of violence against both the landscape and native bodies, further transformed the physical sites of the baghs into symbols of the natives’ defeat. The hanging of accused revolutionaries in the baghs was a practice that continued even after the uprising was crushed. At Lucknow’s Alum Bagh, which became a British-occupied stronghold during the fighting, for instance, revolutionaries were hanged from its gateways.[29] Following the uprising, the landscape within Alum Bagh was drastically transformed by the colonial authorities. In 1858, Martin Gubbins, a British official, reported that “all traces of the garden [in Alum Bagh] have now disappeared, the fruit-trees having all been cut down.”[30] Even in Quaiser Bagh, which had been the seat of power of the Nawabs, gallows were erected.[31] The choice of Quaiser Bagh as a site to erect gallows was meant to signal to the city’s residents that the seat of former power was now completely under colonial control. The perpetuation of violence through the cutting of trees and the hanging of suspects was intended to deter any future possibility of insurgency. A series of physical transformations to these landscape sites followed; tracing them demonstrates how baghs were manipulated toward different political ends. After taking control of Lucknow, the colonial administration targeted baghs as sites for further empire-entrenching interventions.

[27] Forrest, *A History of the Indian Mutiny 1857–58*, 152.

[28] Sidney Hay, *Historic Lucknow* (Lucknow: Pioneer Press, 1939), 213.

[29] Sinha, “Decadence, Mourning and Revolution.”

[30] Martin Richard Gubbins, *An Account of the Mutinies in Oudh and the Siege of Lucknow Residency* (London: Richard Bentley, 1858), 420.

[31] Felice Beato, *Lucknow, India: Panoramic View from the Kaiser Bagh Palace: Section Six*, 1858, albumen photo print, 29 x 24 cm, Wellcome Collection, London.



Image of Sikandar Bagh. Felice Beato, *Interior of the Secundra Bagh, Lucknow, after the Indian Mutiny of 1857-1858*, The New Orleans Museum of Art: Museum purchase, 1977 Art Acquisition Fund Drive, 77.67.

### Degradation

Changes in the typology and naming of baghs were common following the uprising. Aish Bagh, measuring about 110 acres,[32] was one of the largest in Lucknow and the site of an annual *mela*, or fair.[33] After the uprising, a central distillery of European liquor was established there. Further, on the recommendation of the civil surgeon of Lucknow, the imperial authorities began a program of relocating Muslim cemeteries from existing burial grounds, like those at Dowlatgunj, Ganeshgunj, Chowk, and Sadatgunj, to other sites, including Aish Bagh.[34] This displacement of Muslim burial grounds so near to a distillery was an insult to the Muslim community, as reported by the local newspaper *Roznamcha* at the time, since liquor is forbidden in Islam.[35] Despite this discontent, the burial ground was moved to the bagh, long since replacing a portion of Aish Bagh, while other parts were eventually fragmented and absorbed into the city. The physical change of land use shifted the association that city residents had with the bagh. What was once a place full of life—of manicured plantings and annual festivities—was turned into a place centering death. Similar conversions, discussed before, such as the erection of gallows in some baghs, also created a landscape of morbidity. By putting in place such changes, much to the resentment of the city's residents, the colonial authorities ensured the degradation of the baghs.

[32] Conjectured from an archival map of Lucknow from 1858.

[33] Taqui, *1857 ke bad Lucknow ki barbadi*, 34.

[34] Veena Talwar Oldenburg, *The Making of Colonial Lucknow: 1856–1877* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 112.

[35] Oldenburg, *The Making of Colonial Lucknow*, 114.





Aish Bagh Cemetery with a grave from 2021 in the foreground. Courtesy of the author.

After the uprising, Musa Bagh—the last stronghold of Begum Hazrat Mahal, queen and wife of the deposed Nawab Wajid Ali, who had led the insurgency in Lucknow—was left to fall to ruin, subsequently “given over to peaceful tillers of the soil,” as Hay wrote.[36] There are two critical points here. First is the change in use, from a bagh to farmland. The dense vegetation had already been cleared by bombardment, and the newly bare land was given over for farming. This conversion led to a loss of the earlier pleasure landscape features of the bagh, marking a shift from elite to common land use. The second is the change in the primary user of the place. Hay’s projection of the farmer as a productive and cooperative citizen, juxtaposed against insurgent behavior, upholds an implicit moralism.

Hay’s description also demonstrates how colonial historiography served the interests of the Empire. The adjective “peaceful” here implies the British desire to tame the usage of Musa Bagh. The tillers are depicted as peaceful stewards of the land, in contrast to its prior occupation by the revolutionaries. The value of Musa Bagh as a site of insurgency fell as its structures decayed, and further dwindled as its open areas were converted to farmland. The palace at Musa Bagh has since been in a state of abandonment and ruin, and it is little known, let alone visited, today.[37] Through this dual process of abandonment and transformation to the surrounding land, Musa Bagh’s value and cultural legacy have been erased, unrenewed even in the post-independence period.

### Erasure through Planning and Building

Appropriations of other baghs include transformations made to directly serve colonial interests; baghs were converted to house facilities used by the British or incorporated into the production of building typologies unfamiliar to the region. In 1858, Robert Napier, a British army officer, proposed new roads

[36] Hay, *Historic Lucknow*, 187.

[37] Taqui cites a conversation with an elderly person named Shah Nawaz, engaged in farming activity near Musa Bagh, who had witnessed the continuing disintegration of the palace structure and claimed that some remains would still be found if the soil was excavated. Taqui, *1857 ke bad Lucknow ki barbadi*, 29.

and a railway station that would cut across the “Dense City”—a term used on his proposed map in reference to a new Lucknow.[38] The site chosen for the new railway station was Char Bagh, but the British planners did not take into account the existing landscape features when appropriating the bagh to suit their colonial interests. According to one historical account, Char Bagh had many large wells, with water flowing through conduits and fountains.[39] Fountains and water systems were integral features of baghs, as aesthetic elements that also irrigated the land. These features were not retained when the site was converted to a railway station.

The British authorities also appropriated Muhammed Bagh, which had been captured by the advancing British to gain access to the city. Many baghs were situated at key locations connecting a city to other cities and towns, and thus became initial targets of conflict.[40] According to Sinha’s research, parts of Muhammed Bagh were converted into polo grounds and a Presbyterian church.[41] On a map dated 1901 that omits the bagh’s name, a cricket ground and theater also appear on the site.[42] The bagh was completely erased through these development activities. Both Char Bagh and Muhammed Bagh were absorbed into the new cantonment and its ancillary activities. Baghs became early targets to accommodate imperial projects and new typologies. In the process, the colonial layer of intervention erased the previous layer of the bagh, though their traces remain in history and media, even if not in the physical site.

### Reappropriation through Memorialization

Another colonial tool was the conversion of baghs to memorials commemorating British loss. In the state of Jhansi, in central India, another major site of the uprising, the movement was led by their widowed queen, Rani Lakshmbai, who resisted the doctrine of lapse, a British policy that did not recognize her adopted son as a legitimate heir, thus justifying annexation. Amid the tensions, Jhokan Bagh became a center of rebel activity. In June 1857, many British stationed in Jhansi were killed in the bagh, which was located outside the Jhansi fort, by a group of men led by Bakshish Ali, the Jail Darogah of Jhansi,[43] though they had been assured safe passage out of the city.[44] The town was eventually recaptured by British forces in 1858, and its revolutionaries were put on trial. Rani Lakshmbai’s father was arrested, tried, and hanged from a tree in Jhokan Bagh.[45] With this act, the British reframed a site of their defeat as a site to inflict brutal discipline on the native population. Later, the British commissioned a memorial well at Jhokan Bagh to commemorate the British losses. This change in use anglicized the space—the process of memorialization validated and upheld the importance and privileging of British lives. The memorial was also depicted in a lithograph and, later, in photographs,[46] which circulated an image of the memorial across geographies, a colonial technique supporting a specific historical narrative.

The British memorialization of spaces of revolt overwrote history from a colonial point of view. To borrow a term from the postcolonial scholar Ranajit Guha, the Empire wrote a “garrison history”[47] in which its colonial documentation of the uprising chronicled events and fabricated an image

[38] Map: Lucknow in 1858.

[39] Mookherji, *The Pictorial Lucknow*, 247.

[40] Another example is Qudsia Bagh in Delhi, located close to the Kashmiri Gate, which controlled access to the city. It was captured by British troops, who then marched toward the city.

[41] Sinha, “Decadence, Mourning and Revolution.”

[42] Map: Lucknow and environs, 1901.

[43] Lal Bahadur, the Subedar, and Bakshish Ali had assured the British would have safe passage. The role of Rani Lakshmbai in this massacre is not clearly known. Another source mentions that Rani Lakshmbai sheltered a passing group of revolutionaries for three days at Jhokan Bagh. In R. C. Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857* (New Delhi: L.G. Publishers, 2021), 7.

[44] John Smyth, *The Rebellious Rani* (London: Frederick Muller, 1966), 72.

[45] Foreign Political Proceedings, December 30, 1859, Cons. nos. 280–288, 447–451, National Archives, New Delhi, quoted in S. A. A. Rizvi and M. L. Bhargava, eds., *Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh*, Vol. 3 (Uttar Pradesh: Information Department Publications Bureau, 1959), 20.

[46] Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, “The Indian Mutiny,” *Chowkidar* 11 (2007): 49–52.

[47] Ranajit Guha, *The Small Voice of History: Collected Essays* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009), 341.



of a complete history, negating local voices and, at a larger scale, alternate accounts of the past. To extend this argument, the sites of the uprising were framed in a unidirectional way as places of imperial mourning, overwriting any relevance of the sites' pasts or other voices of history. In addition to physical interventions, the British Empire selectively captured, portrayed, and circulated the imagery of the uprising.

### The Image of the Bagh in Empire

The colonial state suppressed the uprising using multiple means and mediums, both on the ground and through modes of dissemination, and extensively captured these sites of resistance in sketches, lithographs, and photographs to form a narrative of imperial conquest and native defeat. It used representational media during and after the uprising to cement a particular narrative about these sites.

One of the most well-known images from the period immediately following the uprising is the same photograph mentioned earlier of Sikandar Bagh in Lucknow, captured by Felice Beato. The image shows—as its title suggests—the interior of Sikandar Bagh, with its centrally located pavilion. There are also four unidentified men and a horse at the plinth of the pavilion and corpses in the foreground. According to a British account, the bagh had been the site of an extremely violent clash on November 16, 1857, and about 2,000 revolutionaries died during the battle.[48] The photograph is purportedly the first-ever known photograph of skeletons.[49] While Sikander Bagh had been an important site of resistance, the photograph reclaimed it as a site of victory, conveying imperial might and projecting native defeat and death. Scholars such as the architectural historian Ateya Khorakiwala and the anthropologist and art historian Christopher Pinney claim that the photograph was in fact staged by Beato.[50] The skeletons were unearthed and then disposed of after the photograph was taken.[51] The fact that Beato had complete access to the site and could stage such a photograph implies the total subjugation and vulnerability of natives' bodies. The photograph was presented as an accurate historical account, circulated in the British Empire and beyond, and even if staged, was accepted as fact, propagating the colonial gaze.

Many such photographs, captured by the British after the uprising was suppressed, attempted to claim factuality. Scholarly work including research from Zahid Chaudhary and Rosie Llewellyn-Jones also indicate how photography became an important tool in capturing and propagating the imagery of war and, by extension, imperial might.[52] In August 1858, Beato's photographs were displayed for sale in Kolkata, and four years later, in London.[53] According to Llewellyn-Jones, the photographs were presented in a sequence that reflected the route taken by the British troops in March 1858 when they recaptured Lucknow. The restaging of the route in this order reinforces the colonial gaze and projects a particular narrative of the events.

Paintings and lithographs were parallel modes of representing the events of the uprising. In addition to being displayed in public, these visuals were also circulated in the form of postcards, which had a wider geographical reach. The British artist Louis Desanges's painted scenes of the uprising—

[48] C. B. Shadwell, *The Life of Colin Campbell, Lord Clyde*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1881), 11.

[49] Ateya Khorakiwala, "Staging the Modern Ruin: Sikandar Bagh, Lucknow," *Thresholds* 41 (Spring 2013): 138.

[50] Christopher Pinney, *The Coming of Photography in India* (London: British Library, 2008).

[51] Pinney, *The Coming of Photography in India*.

[52] See Zahid R. Chaudhary, *Afterimage of Empire: Photography in Nineteenth-Century India* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); and Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, ed., *The Uprising of 1857* (Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 2017).

[53] Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, *Lucknow: Then and Now* (Mumbai: Marg Foundation, 2003), 137.

referred to as the “Indian Mutiny,” reducing it to a narrative of sepoy rebelling against the British authority—were displayed at the Crystal Palace in the 1860s and ’70s.[54] These paintings reassured British citizens, the primary consumers of these depictions of death and destruction, of the brutal might the British Empire could successfully deploy in the colonies. The production of exhibitions, postcards, newspapers, and other media became a way to reduce the uprising to a form of colonial knowledge.[55] These tools of knowledge production, representation, and circulation across the Empire made the uprising a part of British history. This form of knowledge production similarly extends to the archival record of the uprising.

### Baghs in the Archives

In encountering the history of the baghs in relation to the uprising, I examined multiple personal and official accounts, maps, sketches, and many other kinds of recorded data across repositories such as the National Archives of India and the British Library. These documents testify to the particular ways in which the events and sites of the uprising were captured, primarily by British witnesses, and circulated over the ensuing decades in the British Empire before the turn of the twentieth century. The subjugation of local powers following their defeat in the uprising provided imperial powers unrestricted access to revolutionary spaces, giving them absolute agency to illustrate, photograph, and thus circulate images of the baghs. The photographs, lithographs, and sketches from this period share a peculiar commonality: they have mostly been drawn or shot from the direction and perspective of the attacking colonial forces. As a colonial apparatus, the camera circulated back images of destruction from a very specific point of view. The two archival images, exterior and interior, of Sikan-dar Bagh[56] were both shot from the direction from which the colonial forces advanced; they do not look the other way to frame the views the revolutionaries would have seen.[57] The colonial gaze is embedded in how these spaces were captured across mediums.

Another critical medium that captured the events were maps of the cities, sketched during and after the uprising. These maps were published in Britain to help inform the British about the events of the uprising.[58] By reading these colonial maps together, one learns that the routes the British troops took supposedly followed a series of events and progressed from one site to another. This chronology of events is also reflected in textual records and captured in photographs. These routes were then published in guidebooks in the nineteenth century and followed by British travelers visiting these sites after the uprising.[59] The guidebooks curated a fixed, linear journey that British visitors would follow, time and time again reasserting their colonial history. The accounts in newspapers, publications, and postcards upheld the British, valorized their troops, and diminished or entirely dismissed local forces. In one of these texts, *The Pictorial Lucknow*, it was noted that “occasionally an army of monkey-mouthed Bahadurs went out and attacked the Alambagh position...”[60] Such narrations stereotyped the “enemy” as a single universalized and racialized body. Thus, rereading the archives with the baghs as protagonists challenges the British narrative.

[54] Louis William Desanges, *Surgeon Anthony Dickson Home and Assistant Surgeon William Bradshaw, 90th Regiment of Foot (Perthshire Volunteers) (Light Infantry), Lucknow, 1857, 1860*, oil on canvas, National Army Museum, London.

[55] Guha, *The Small Voice of History*, 341.

[56] Felice Beato, *The Breach in Sekundra Bagh*, nineteenth century, albumen photographic print, 27.3 x 22 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

[57] Another example is the photograph of Qudsia Bagh in Delhi, shot in 1858 by Beato.

[58] Susan Gole, “Maps for the Uprising of 1857,” in Llewellyn-Jones, *The Uprising of 1857*, 183.

[59] Llewellyn-Jones, *Lucknow: Then and Now*, 137.

[60] Mookherji, *The Pictorial Lucknow*, 51.

**Baghs Today**



Sikandar Bagh. Note the road that cuts through the bagh. Left: map is from the General Plan of the Operations at Lucknow in 1857; center: map is from the Plan of the City of Lucknow, 1859; right: satellite image.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, fewer changes in the baghs have been recorded. There was a renewed interest in reclaiming these spaces in the post-independence period, 1947 onward, marking a shift away from the colonialist management of the spaces. India's independence gave citizens almost unrestricted access to the spaces of erstwhile baghs, and the interventions in the decades after independence can be read as a layer of nationalist history. For instance, the memorial garden in Kanpur[61] was converted into Nana Rao Park to commemorate the Indian leaders of the uprising, replacing the British colonial icons. A series of name changes also took place: Benarasi Bagh, which the British had named Wingfield Park and later the Prince of Wales Zoological Garden, was renamed the Nawab Wajid Ali Shah Zoological Garden in 2015.

[61] It was built by the British authorities at the site of Bibighar as a memorial to the massacre of Europeans imprisoned within.

Still, colonial interventions persist. The change in typology from a bagh to that of a church or a railway station have become part of the urban fabric. Even the road that cuts through Sikandar Bagh is a remnant of colonial transformations. The original cultural associations and significance of these spaces have been lost.[62]

[62] Taqui, 1857 *ke bad Lucknow ki barbadi*.



Jhokan Bagh with people playing in the background. Courtesy of the author.

The memorial built by the British at Jhokan Bagh in Jhansi is rarely acknowledged by citizens today. When I recently visited, the surrounding space was being used to play cricket! A board near the entrance to the bagh declares it as a “protected monument” under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), an agency established by the British in 1861 after the uprising. There seems to be a tension between the intentions of the ASI and the use of the space by the town’s residents. The ASI’s board has not deterred the cricket players, and they have been indifferent to the existence of the memorial structure right in the center of the bagh. The indifference exhibited toward the presence of the memorial well may be seen as an effect or act of decolonization. The postcolonial and subaltern studies scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty, in his article “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for ‘Indian’ Pasts?” asks, “Why cannot we, once again, return the gaze?”[63] I would argue that the current use of Jhokan Bagh indicates a challenging gaze of indifference to the existence of memorialized British loss as it confronts colonial history and its afterlives.

Questioning colonial historiography by tracing the ways in which baghs were transformed, recorded, and presented is also a process of decolonizing this history. The dismantling of this garrison history[64] forms a part of a new historiography, one that brings to the fore alternate perspectives, sites, and histories that critique a homogenizing colonial narrative.[65] Changes in the occupation and use of baghs in the post-independence period include the removal or replacement of sites of colonial loss, the installation of statues commemorating the revolutionaries, and the renaming of sites—reconfiguring the baghs as sites of resistance to colonial rule and adding a layer of postcolonial appropriation charged with nationalistic and political intentions. [66] These changes further add to the palimpsestic nature of baghs and offer parallel possibilities of counter-reading their histories, calling into question the linearity of colonial interpretation and circulation. Decolonization retrieves the past to consciously foreground new voices and make small histories visible, an important process as our understanding of history bears on our understanding of the present.

[63] Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for ‘Indian’ Pasts?,” *Representations* 37 (1992): 1–26.

[64] Guha, *The Small Voice of History*, 341.

[65] Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History.”

[66] In the last decade in Lucknow’s Sikandar Bagh, there has been a series of political associations commemorating the martyrdom of Uda Devi, a Dalit woman revolutionary who died there during the uprising. These changes are part of the practice of decolonization.