

**Creating the India Gate Digital Archive:  
Archival Strategies with the Records Continuum Model**

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### **Abstract**

This paper presents a proposal for the India Gate Digital Archive, an online portal featuring a digital community archive, oral history initiative, and digital humanities project contextualizing the India Gate in New Delhi through the lens of the records continuum model. With an emphasis on the relationships and reactions generated by the monument, the project seeks to create affective documents and descriptions as a supplement to the Gate's bureaucratic colonial records. With the India Gate situated as the touchstone of this archival endeavor, the whole history of the land it occupies becomes part of the aggregated project. The proposal is preceded by a brief history of the India Gate, which describes the complex symbolisms associated with the physical monument while reinforcing the necessity for a records continuum approach. The India Gate Digital Archive proposal is followed by a series of questions that consider the breadth of its possibilities and limitations.

### Collecting Fragments: Towards a Unified Archive of the India Gate

Uniting the fragmented pieces of history that describe, contextualize, and bring awareness to a singular site of memorialization is a monumental task. Situated in the heart of New Delhi, the India Gate (formerly named the All-India War Memorial) is an architectural memorial/monument that has undergone a pluralization of titles, manifestations, and symbolisms since its completion in 1931.<sup>1</sup> [The](#) India Gate is an archway of incredible grandiosity and stature, imbued with both colonial and post-independence symbolisms. It is often compared to the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, yet it occupies the very land cited as the ancient city of Indraprastha in Hindu and Buddhist sacred texts.<sup>2</sup> In what is now present-day New Delhi, the legendary city set the stage for the epic battle between Arjuna and the Godhead Krishna portrayed in the *Bhagavad Gita*.<sup>3</sup> To capture the intricate histories embedded within the space, time, and locality of the India Gate, [I suggest](#) an online portal with three archival components [could](#) be created to serve as an ideal anchor point for the everchanging records that characterize the monument and its surrounding land.

The documents and records affiliated with the India Gate's conception, creation, completion, and reception can be found in archives in both India and Britain. A free and widely available digital archive [must](#) be created to unify all India Gate related manuscripts, architectural plans, correspondences, and photographs in one repository, alongside pre-colonial Delhi archival material. The India Gate archive will employ the indigenous content management system, Mukurtu, in order to allow for multiple records to build upon documents found in British

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<sup>1</sup> Irving, Robert Grant. *Indian Summer*. 2nd ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 259.

<sup>2</sup> "Indraprastha | Legendary City, India." Encyclopedia Britannica. Accessed December 13, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Indraprastha>.

<sup>3</sup> Eknath, Easwaran, ed. *The Bhagavad Gita*. 2nd ed. The Classics of Indian Spirituality. Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press, 2007.

institutions.<sup>4</sup> By developing partnerships with the British Library, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Archives, the National Archive of India, and the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, the India Gate Digital Archive would be populated with digital records repatriated from Britain and shared from Indian institutions.

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By pragmatically applying the records continuum model to the case of the India Gate's splintered records, the very active nature of these documents, both old and new, come into clear focus in the current moment. As scholar of New Media and Performance, Gabriella Giannachi, has described, the archive is a tool for producing presence, and it exists in a constant state of flux while doing so. She goes on to state, "[T]he archive is where our presence and identity are generated and transmitted. In this sense, the archive is about the production of our permanence, but to produce this permanence, the archive must remain in a state of unrest."<sup>5</sup> This simultaneous state of continual restlessness and presence requires habitual updates by participating users of the archive. To achieve this paradoxical ideal, Mukurtu may be utilized to pluralize the voices and uplift the *relationships* among people that the records affect. In this case, the records continuum model is inclusive of both personal and public recordkeeping practices and aims to expand upon the British narratives that describe the architectural plans, correspondences, and other records that gave way to the physical manifestation of the India Gate.<sup>6</sup> Managing the endless emergence of records requires a robust container in order to reconsider the monument's elusive meanings and manifestations. The India Gate digital community archive, oral history initiative, and digital humanities rendering of the land's transformations would allow for such a retelling of the past.

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<sup>4</sup> "Mukurtu - Our Mission." Mukurtu CMS. Accessed December 11, 2018. <http://mukurtu.org/about/>.

<sup>5</sup> Giannachi, Gabriella. *Archive Everything: Mapping the Everyday* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 36.

<sup>6</sup> McKemmish, Sue. "Evidence of Me... in a Digital World." in *I, Digital: Personal Collection in the Digital Era* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2011), 121.

Before delving into the details of the proposal, it is essential to lay the groundwork of the India Gate's inception and ever-evolving history in its physical form. After briefly examining this history, the details of the India Gate Digital Archive will be outlined while turning attention to the Qatar Digital Library, a successful transnational digital archiving project. Beyond this example, population issues facing New Delhi will be highlighted, while detailing the importance of physical conservation of the monument. To conclude, reflections upon the financial, cultural, political, and local challenges will be considered through a series of questions as a means of coming to terms with the possibilities and practical limitations of this archival endeavor.

#### **A Brief History of the Monument: From All-India War Memorial to India Gate**

Upon gaining independence in August 1947, the people of New Delhi began renaming roads and removing imperial monuments, alleviating the pressure and presence of British rule while reclaiming national identity.<sup>7</sup> This newfound reality of sovereignty opened the opportunity to take ownership over colonized spaces in the capital. Many of these changes were first made on the local and municipal level; the updated names generated new records as the British High Commission of India began to recognize and officially document these alterations by autumn 1948.<sup>8</sup> To this day, the remnants of the British Raj reverberate throughout New Delhi and India at large—all colonial/post-colonial records continue to have a life of their own amidst the sea changes of history.

Originally named the All-India War Memorial Arch, the India Gate monument, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, was completed in 1931 and erected in honor of the 60,000 Indian soldiers

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<sup>7</sup> "All-India War Memorial Arch (India Gate), by Edwin Lutyens." Victorian Web. Accessed December 12, 2018. <http://www.victorianweb.org/art/architecture/lutyens/12.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, David A. "New Delhi's All-India War Memorial (India Gate): Death, Monumentality and the Lasting Legacy of Empire in India." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 46, no. 2 (March 4, 2018), 352.

and officers who lost their lives fighting on behalf of Great Britain during World War I and the third Afghan War of 1919.<sup>9</sup> Upon its completion, the official New Delhi inauguration ceremony commenced after twenty years of construction.<sup>10</sup> Even in a moment that was meant to capture unity between India and the British imperial forces that controlled them, the arch towered over New Delhi demanding loyalty from the colonized.<sup>11</sup> Initially entrenched in an aura of war memorialization, it had a distinct British flavor, both in its aesthetic and the simple fact that it was conceived in the minds of British rulers and architects.

For an architect with such a vested interest in honoring the lives of Indian soldiers, Lutyens held a distasteful opinion of the artistic conventions native to India. In correspondences between Lutyens and his colleague Sir Herbert Baker, he belittled Mughal architecture in a note describing its formula, "...before you erect [the structure], carve every stone differently and independently, with lace patterns and terrifying shapes. On the top, build over trabeated pendentives an onion."<sup>12</sup> With little respect for Indian heritage and an aesthetic deeply rooted in classical Roman and Greek traditions, Lutyens' New Delhi, and specifically the All-India War Memorial, was established as an emblem of dominance over the people of India. In its essence, the memorial functioned on a variety of symbolic levels and summoned multiple meanings to different groups of people. Without a central archive detailing these complex relationships through oral histories and systemized updates of the evidentiary records, the process of colonization will only continue to persist within this space.

It is crucial to remember that the India Gate is contextualized not only by political, historical, and social forces but also by its surrounding geography and architectural planning.

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<sup>9</sup> Irving, 258.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, 351.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>12</sup> Irving, 101.

The All-India War Memorial was the cornerstone of Lutyens' New Delhi, and several meters behind it, a four-pillared canopy featuring a statue of King George V once overlooked the memorial.<sup>13</sup> Within this symbolic statement, the new capital of India was continually watched over by the gaze of its British rulers until the opportunity for change arose through Indian sovereignty. On the literal road to independence, the central boulevard in New Delhi, King's Way, changed to Rajpath, and the crowning emblem of Lutyens' New Delhi, the All-India War Memorial Arch, transformed to "India Gate". The statue to George V was relocated, and the canopy remains empty to this day after several bids to erect a statue to Mahatma Gandhi have stalled.<sup>14</sup> The shifting attitudes reflected in the name changes and dismantled monuments simultaneously ushered new cultural symbolisms of colonial sites, evolving from British designated mythologies. For many citizens reclaiming identity from the British empire, India Gate, as the name suggests, became the "gateway to a new India".<sup>15</sup> Reflections in the form of oral histories may begin to color the affective reverberation of this particular designation.

A quarter of a century after its completion, the India Gate further evolved with the addition of a post-independence war memorial. Amar Jawan Jyoti, meaning "flame of the immortal warrior" in Hindi, honors the unknown Indian soldiers who lost their lives during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971.<sup>16</sup> Free from imperial architectural influence, the minimal monument depicts a reversed rifle topped with a helmet. Flanked by four urns, one contains a constant flame in honor of the deceased. The aura of Amar Jawan Jyoti strongly reinforces the initial symbolic, commemorative intent of the All-India War Memorial. After forty years of conceptualization, the

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<sup>13</sup> Irving, 180.

<sup>14</sup> "All-India War Memorial Arch (India Gate), by Edwin Lutyens." Victorian Web. Accessed December 9, 2018. <http://www.victorianweb.org/art/architecture/lutyens/12.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Johnson, 353.

<sup>16</sup> "Amar Jawan Jyoti | Indian Memorial." Encyclopedia Britannica. Accessed December 14, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Amar-Jawan-Jyoti>.

India Ministry of Defense's bid for the first national war memorial is now underway.<sup>17</sup> Despite several postponements, concrete plans for a National War Museum are in progress.<sup>18</sup> This addition will further shift the site towards an even stronger ambience of war remembrance. In this constantly evolving terrain, archival intervention becomes a necessary act of decolonization.

### Proposal Introduction – Preserving the Plural Histories of the India Gate

The India Gate, with all of its versions and preceding histories, must be considered within the records continuum model in order to preserve the plurality of identities contained within its existence. While it may not be possible to unite all *physical* records relating to the India Gate's construction, history, identities, reactions, and relationships, a digital effort to bring these documents and stories together in one aggregated system may serve as a space for active reconsideration of the monument's functions and symbolisms. In order to preserve the past and evolving history of the land currently occupied by the India Gate, I am proposing an online portal that would house an archival project comprised of three components: a digital archive, oral history initiative, and digital humanities project. Encapsulated in this framework, all records, both aggregated from institutions and created by participants, become increasingly dynamic as descriptions and metadata are added to create a vast network of interconnected objects.<sup>19</sup> The archive becomes *active* in this inclusive approach to recordkeeping. Through this activation, an expansion of personal and collective identities becomes increasingly viable.

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<sup>17</sup> "Ministry Seeks New War Memorial," December 5, 2006. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/ministry-seeks-new-war-memorial/story-uw8xt2V3v1qU36rbmcodN1.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Bhatnagar, Gaurav V. "National War Museum Design Runs Into Urban Art Commission, Heritage Panel Wall." *The Wire*. Accessed December 12, 2018. <https://architexturez.net/pst/az-cf-186500-1524473310>.

<sup>19</sup> McKemmish, 122.



The second component of the project consists of an oral history initiative, aimed towards gathering records in the form of audio narratives of multi-generational interviewees documenting individuals involved in the construction of the monument, as well as people who wish to share their personal reflections relating to the monument. Because the older generations are closest to the origins of the colonial arch, it is a time-sensitive project and should be treated with priority in order to preserve the stories before it is too late.

In the final component of the project, a three-dimensional digital humanities rendering will depict the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-independence evolution of the land currently occupied by the India Gate and Amar Jawan Jyoti. By aggregating metadata from the digital archive, the geospatial project will be contextualized by record evidence, user-generated information, and ancient Hindu and Buddhist texts to create a complete historical picture of Delhi.

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### **Proposal Part I: Aggregating Records in a Digital Community Archive**

In creating a robust digital infrastructure to house disparate materials relating to the India Gate's formative histories and evolving symbolisms, a platform for participatory action centralizes all information and ideas in one repository. Utilizing the content management system, Mukurtu, community interventionists are able to update the colonial records from their own point of view. Because Mukurtu was developed for indigenous communities, the framework is conducive for customization.<sup>20</sup> With this approach, representatives agreed upon within a given community may be an ambassador for the new perspective of India Gate's records. In developing a workflow for the India Gate digital archive, specified curation of metadata would lead to

<sup>20</sup> "Mukurtu - Our Mission." Mukurtu CMS. Accessed December 13, 2018. <http://mukurtu.org/about/>.

standardized updated records within the Mukurtu interface.<sup>21</sup> The emphasis shifts from the records to the relationships contained within the community who is rediscovering, re-contextualizing, and redefining the colonial archive.

Before aggregating all records pertaining to the India Gate, partnerships with the institutions that house the material must first be forged, followed by the development of a digital repatriation agreement. Beginning with the United Kingdom, the British Library holds several collections comprised entirely of Indian material. The Delhi Collection contains 3,500 volumes of Arabic, Persian, and Urdu language manuscripts from the Mughal Imperial Library preceding the British Raj.<sup>22</sup> A separate collection, The India Office Records and Private Papers, contains East India Company records of pre-1947 India and amasses 14 kilometers of shelving space in the British Library.<sup>23</sup> The Royal Institute for British Architects (RIBA) houses the collection of Sir Herbert Baker, who exchanged many letters with Lutyens during the process of developing the All-India War Memorial.<sup>24</sup> In one such letter from 1912, Lutyens illustrated a sketch of the Viceroy's House with textual notes detailed on the peripheries. The RIBA Archives boasts over 1.5 million photographs and 150,000 books; a simple search of "Lutyens New Delhi" in their online image archive delivers a result of 140 items of drawings, maps, and photographs of 20<sup>th</sup> century material. The records within these collections are crucial to the context of the India Gate; partnerships among the facilitators of the India Gate Digital Archive and the British Library and

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<sup>21</sup> Christen, Kimberly. "Relationships, Not Records: Digital Heritage and the Ethics of Sharing Indigenous Knowledge Online." Edited by Jentery Sayers. (*Routledge Companion to Media Studies and Digital Humanities*, 2018), 406.

<sup>22</sup> "The Delhi Collection." The British Library. Accessed December 13, 2018. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-guides/the-delhi-collection>.

<sup>23</sup> "India Office Records and Private Papers." The British Library. Accessed December 13, 2018. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-guides/india-office-records>.

<sup>24</sup> "Letter from Sir Edwin Lutyens to Sir Herbert Baker Illustrated with a Plan and Sketch of the First Scheme for the Viceroy's House, Dated 13 June 1912 | RIBA." RIBApix. Accessed December 13, 2018. <https://www.architecture.com/image-library/RIBApix/image-information/poster/letter-from-sir-edwin-lutyens-to-sir-herbert-baker-illustrated-with-a-plan-and-sketch-of-the-first-s/posterid/RIBA35123.html>.

RIBA could be leveraged on the principle of digital repatriation for objects that demand multiple provenances.<sup>25</sup>

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Within India, the National Archives house government documents such as the report of a Delhi Town-Planning Committee on the choice of a site for the new imperial capital in Delhi.<sup>26</sup> Even more records relating to the India Gate are found in India's first municipal archive, the Amal Home Digital Archive.<sup>27</sup> In this community archive, rare photographs of Kolkata from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, correspondences of figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Netaji Subhas, and Chandra Bose, as well as original sales deeds from the East India Company are all threads related to Lutyens' New Delhi.<sup>28</sup> In addition to these Indian archives, INTACH would serve as a crucial resource for the digital archive as well. An India Gate Digital Archive would unite all records within these isolated repositories into one, centralized space.

Looking towards the success of the Qatar Digital Library, the collaborations between the Qatar Foundation, Qatar National Library, and British Library prove that steps towards digital repatriation are indeed achievable in the age of digital archiving. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed by members of the Qatar Foundation, Qatar National Library, and British Library Board in an initiative to digitize manuscripts from the India Office Records on the Gulf to be made freely and publically available on the Qatar Digital Library website.<sup>29</sup> Because these efforts are already underway, the British Library is well equipped to digitize materials from their collections. In a similar manner, the entity in charge of the India Gate

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<sup>25</sup> McKemmish, Evidence of me... In a Digital World, 123.

<sup>26</sup> "Abhilekh Patal: Report of the Delhi Town-Planning Committee on the choice of a site for the new Imperial Capital at Delhi." Accessed December 13, 2018. <http://www.abhilekh-patal.in/jspui/handle/123456789/945136>.

<sup>27</sup> "Kolkata: India's First Municipal Archive | International Council on Archives." Accessed December 13, 2018. <https://www.ica.org/en/kolkata-indias-first-municipal-archive>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> "Qatar Foundation Expands UK Ties." *The Foundation: The Monthly Magazine of Qatar Foundation*, November 2010, 30.

Digital Archive can make the case for shared ownership of these documents that are vitally important to Indian identities. However, building these relationships depends upon the subjecthood of the archivist. Feminist scholar, Durba Ghosh, describes her experience navigating both British and Indian archives while researching relationships among Indian women and European men during the colonial period, "...the ways in which archives are national institutions that regular access to scholars, both formally and informally, often structure the information historians are able to retrieve."<sup>30</sup> Navigating the national waters of archives requires astute planning and self-awareness. Mediating an agreement among national archives and libraries requires strategy and oftentimes political negotiation that would need to honor all participating beneficiaries. For the archivists in charge of the India Gate Digital Archive, a convincing argument for the importance of a community-based archive would have to be delivered to the monumental institutions that house its related material.

Creating an India Gate Digital Archive would fundamentally adhere to the records continuum model through the implementation of an infrastructure allowing for continually updated records. Subsequently, a trail of metadata documenting these augmentations would be necessary for transparency. In "Trust and context in cyberspace," Geoffrey Yeo emphasizes the need for trust in the digital archive as confidence continues to erode in physical archival institutions.<sup>31</sup> As a means of verifying updated records, elected facilitators within the community could be in charge of updating the vintage British records. In what Yeo has called 'meta-provenance', online user updates would maintain a trail of metadata tracking these alterations.<sup>32</sup> Among the dimensions of creation, capture, pluralization, and organization within the records

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<sup>30</sup> Ghosh, Durba. "National Narratives and the Politics of Miscengenation." In *Archival Stories*, edited by Antoinette Burton, 27–44. (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2005), 28.

<sup>31</sup> Yeo, Geoffrey. "Trust and Context in Cyberspace." *Archives and Records* 34, no. 2 (2013), 224.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 225.

continuum model, there is room for multiple creators, or “actors”, as the records shift and change through space-time.<sup>33</sup> In practice, the multiple providences must be tracked in order to maintain best recordkeeping practices within the space of the digital archive.

Preserving the India Gate in its fullness requires retaining the continually evolving records and the symbolisms they carry through time. In “Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination”, cultural anthropologist, Ann Laura Stoler, asserts, “Imperial effects occupy multiple historical tenses. They are at once products of the past imperfect that selectively permeate the present as they shape both the conditional subjunctive and uncertain futures.”<sup>34</sup> With this sentiment in mind, the far-flung records that gave birth to the existence of the India Gate are never dormant, even when nobody is employing their physical use.

In capturing the multinational identities as illustrated through the documents and records characterizing the India Gate, the goal is not to separate British from Indian identity, rather the aim is to explore how these overarching national labels merge, inform, and create new ones. Because the British have maintained ownership over most of the documents pertaining to the India Gate and Lutyens’ New Delhi, it is imperative to allow native citizens to contextualize these evidentiary records from their point of view. With this approach, complex formations of identity within colonized spaces are acknowledged and not necessarily deemed as separate, rather, they are entangled with British influence. As Edward Said has noted, “We must start by characterizing the commonest ways that people handle the tangled, many-sided legacy of imperialism, not just those who left the colonies, but also those who were there in the first place

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<sup>33</sup> McKemmish, Evidence of me... In a Digital World, 119.

<sup>34</sup> Stoler, Laura Ann. “Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination.” *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 2 (May 2008), 197.

and who remained, the natives.”<sup>35</sup> The consequences of colonialism inform the present moment and define the cross national, hybrid experiences many India natives internalize.<sup>36</sup> These personal experiences are granted the space for exploration with the Mukurtu multiple records tool. While this can be hierarchical, the community in charge of the archive may need to designate a representative to write the record for a large demographic. An additional metadata section with notes allowing for community dialogue using an online forum format may further imbue the system with an inclusive nature.

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## Proposal Part II: Oral History Initiative

Updating the colonial records with descriptive text is needed but it’s simply not enough. While the decisions of who would write the descriptive text must be decided by the local communities (and designated representatives within them), oral history projects allow for an infinite number of contributors. In her essay “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” Ann Stoler points to Michel De Certeau’s notion of the “historic turn” in the field of anthropology, citing that students dealing with colonial materials no longer simply study these fraught histories. Reflections on the damaging repercussions of imperialism have given rise to interventions meant to redistribute power to the populations who have been repeatedly silenced.<sup>37</sup> Oral histories are one such tool that can disrupt the colonial narrative by favoring the voices of those who have been left out of archival spaces. This trend towards inclusivity is evidential of the “archival turn”<sup>38</sup>; in this future, reflective narratives inform the colonial archive

<sup>35</sup> Said, Edward. “Images of the Past, Pure and Impure,” in *Culture and Imperialism* (1st ed. New York: Vintage, 1993), 17.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>37</sup> Stoler, 89.

<sup>38</sup> McKemmish, Sue, and Anne Gilliland. “Archival and Recordkeeping Research: Past, Present, and Future.” In *Research Methods: Information, Systems, and Contexts*, edited by K. Williamson and G. Johanson,

and bring power imbalances back into harmony. The archive, then, becomes the anchored space for reconfiguring colonized bodies, places, and monuments. This is not to say that an audience does not matter—rather, recordkeeping becomes a “kind of witnessing”<sup>39</sup> and vehicle for memorializing the lives of interviewees in relation to the India Gate.

In an attempt to “complicate the link between record and event in order to accommodate records collectively conjured by affect rather than created by event,”<sup>40</sup> a democratized approach to this oral history initiative may begin to populate the overall India Gate archive with contextual evidence of the reactions, relationships, and affective imprints left upon the intergenerational citizenry of New Delhi. The India Gate oral history initiative should be modeled after the South Asian American Digital Archive’s “First Days” oral history project. The First Days Project is an active archive that collects and shares audio stories of immigrants’ first days in the United States.<sup>41</sup> The interface boasts a simple design with a linear timeline spanning from 1939 to 2018, with orange dots stacked upwards over individual oral history entries’ corresponding dates of arrival to the United States. Additionally, there are multiple ways to browse stories—by map, gallery, or by generating a random story. An invitation in the top navigation bar reads “+Add Your Story”, leading the user to a page that allows for self-added metadata through a series of standardized questions. There is a way to upload an audio-file of an interview, as framed by a standard list of questions to be used by all participants. Applying this approach to the India Gate would allow for anyone to have their voices included in the archive.

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79–112. Prahran, Victoria: Tilde Publishing, 2013. <https://dianaascher.com/archival-and-recordkeeping-research-past-present-and-future-mckemmish-gilliland/>.

<sup>39</sup> McKemmish, Sue. “Evidence of *me*.” *The Australian Library Journal* 45, no. 3 (January 1996), 174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049670.1996.10755757>.

<sup>40</sup> Gilliland, Anne J., and Michelle Caswell. “Records and Their Imaginaries: Imagining the Impossible, Making Possible the Imagined.” *Archival Science* 16, no. 1 (March 1, 2016), 72. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-015-9259-z>

<sup>41</sup> “First Days Project.” First Days Project. Accessed December 12, 2018. <https://www.firstdaysproject.org>.

The same graphic model of the timeline could be adapted for the first time the interviewees visited the India Gate. A series of questions inquiring about the reactions to the architecture, its meaning, and personal value would orient the power towards the participant. Instead of allowing the India Gate to stand as a colonial symbol in its physical manifestation, this archival approach brings power to the citizens of New Delhi. The city of New Delhi itself has a population of 257,803 inhabitants as of 2018, and the wider metropolitan area exceeds 26 million people.<sup>42</sup> Reflections on the India Gate must come from the people of India themselves. Feminist cultural theorist, Anjali Arondekar, has pointed out, “While shifts in critical modes have occurred, the additive model of subalternity still persists, where even as the impossibility of recovery is articulated the desire to add, to fill in the gaps with other unvoiced ‘subalterns,’ remains.”<sup>43</sup> By designing the oral history project website to favor New Delhi citizens, as well as people who have first-hand accounts of the India Gate’s construction, these accounts may begin to fill in the gaps and correct mythologies of colonial dominance.

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### Proposal Phase III: Digital Humanities Project

Supplementary to the digital archive and oral history initiatives, a digital humanities project tracing the whole history of the land occupied by the India Gate would broadly contextualize the space while highlighting its pre-colonial past. Turning to another successful example, Stanford University’s Spatial History Project has produced a number of geographically elaborate digital humanities projects. “Boundaries of Nature: Sixty years of landscape change in the Iguaçu National Park in Brazil” visually illustrates the impact of environmental policy on the

<sup>42</sup> “New Delhi Population 2018 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs).” World Population Review. Accessed December 12, 2018. <http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/new-delhi-population/>.

<sup>43</sup> Arondekar, Anjali. “Without a Trace: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality, University of Texas Press* 14, no. 1/2 Special Issue: Studying the History of Sexuality: Theory, Methods, Praxis (April 2005), 14.



preservation of the park's landscape.<sup>44</sup> Applying this approach to the India Gate, a bird-eye view perspective may be adopted to trace the architectural impact of the geographical space that comprised present day New Delhi, with records from the digital archive informing the visual design as it dates back to pre-colonial eras. It is imperative to create an illustrated representation of the land in order to bestow full context into the archival narrative.

Returning to the records continuum model, the digital humanities depiction of the India Gate and the land's history is essential to this archival project because it will give the documents and records within the digital archive a new life. In terms of design, an illustrative depiction of the land through different timespans would link to corresponding records in order to visually describe the variety of manifestation of its coordinates. This expansive project would contextualize the period of colonialism by imbuing the space with vast Indian cultural heritage.

#### **A Pause for Reflection: Who will facilitate this project?**

Many ethical considerations arise within a project of this magnitude. The most glaring inquiry dares to ask who the most appropriate party would be to undertake this archival venture. The question of whether the online portal should be housed, managed, and facilitated by a grassroots community organization or an institution with robust infrastructure, funding, and notoriety is fundamental to the groundwork of the project. Several institutions will be examined in consideration of this, including: the National War Museum, the National Archives of India, and INTACH.

The National War Museum that is being built in the vicinity of the India Gate has a clear and narrow mission that confines itself to the history of war in India, and therefore would not be

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<sup>44</sup> "Spatial History Project." Stanford Spatial History Project. Accessed December 13, 2018. [http://web.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/viz.php?id=433&project\\_id=](http://web.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/viz.php?id=433&project_id=)

inclusive of all symbolisms imbued within the India Gate. Representatives of the forthcoming museum have specified that, “[The] National War Museum will be an institution to collect, preserve, interpret and display military artefacts, portray significant events of our nation’s wars and conflicts and related objects of historical importance for education and promoting patriotism.”<sup>45</sup> While it would be the most convenient and potentially most funded center for the digital archive, the opportunity for pluralism within the preservation of the monuments symbolism would put too much emphasis on its militant nature.

While the National Archives of India may seem like a suitable choice, infrastructural and ethical issues pervade the institution. Before embarking on a digital archive project, issues concerning physical conservation must first be addressed. Reports detailing the defacement of historical documents through user annotations, dog-eared papers, and careless photocopying of delicate records illustrate the lack of professional standards within the National Archives.<sup>46</sup> Instead, Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) would likely be a better host institution for the India Gate online portal. Within its mission statement, INTACH strives to “widen and strengthen its base so as to involve people in caring for [Indian] common heritage...”<sup>47</sup> INTACH is the entity responsible for physical conservation and would be in charge of the maintenance of the India Gate itself.

Another option would be a more neutral entity to represent the multiplicity of voices demanded of this project. A trend towards secularity threatens the prospect of this ambitious, three-fold project. Since 2003, a trend toward secularity in India has taken hold in the form of

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<sup>45</sup>“Bhatnagar, Gaurav V. “National War Museum Design Runs Into Urban Art Commission, Heritage Panel Wall.” *The Wire*. Accessed December 12, 2018. <https://architexturez.net/pst/az-cf-186500-1524473310>.

<sup>46</sup> “How the National Archives of India Is Actually Destroying History.” *The Wire*. Accessed December 13, 2018. <https://thewire.in/history/national-archives-of-india>.

<sup>47</sup> “INTACH Architectural Heritage | Architectural Heritage.” India National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage. Accessed December 14, 2018. <http://architecturalheritage.intach.org/>.

textbook revisions, and sheds light on the influence of religious nationalism and its power in archives within India.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, readership must be considered here. As Arondekar suggests, “archives are untenable without readers.”<sup>49</sup> If a grassroots approach were taken up by the citizens of New Delhi, users and participants of the archive would blend together. No matter what institution or grassroots organization claims this project, the issue of longevity becomes central to the endurance of the archive.

### **How can this project be funded?**

With a grassroots organization leading the charge, the question of funding becomes crucial. Since this project would be fundamentally community driven, crowdsourcing would be an appropriate tool for fundraising. In order to spark widespread support, the crowdsourcing website, Global Giving, would best suit this particular project.<sup>50</sup> On the site’s main page, the “Top Countries Funded” tab cites India as number one on the list. Global visibility of the project would be promoted online, and plaques in front of the India Gate could also direct tourists to the website to make a donation.

In addition to crowdsourced funding, assistance from the International Council on Archives may be called upon to advise how to financially sustain a project of this magnitude. Meetings with leaders of the Qatar Digital Library project may lead to other financial opportunities, perhaps from international philanthropic donors. Fortunately, digital repatriation practices offer low-cost surrogates for communities that wish to have control of their own

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<sup>48</sup> “The Future Of The Indian Past.” Outlook India. Accessed December 12, 2018. <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/the-future-of-the-indian-past/223453>.

<sup>49</sup> Arondekar, 11.

<sup>50</sup> “About GlobalGiving.” Global Giving. Accessed December 12, 2018. <https://www.globalgiving.org/aboutus/>.

records.<sup>51</sup> In the International Council on Archives Code of Ethics, it asserts that, “archivists should promote the preservation and use of the world’s documentary heritage, through working co-operatively with the member of their own and other profession.”<sup>52</sup> In the spirit of this ideal, interdisciplinary collaborative efforts to decolonize the archive must be made to create dynamic and inclusive records networks.

### **How would the multiplicity of languages be managed within the oral history project?**

While the majority of New Delhi citizens speak Hindi, there are dozens of other languages spoken on a daily basis within this city.<sup>53</sup> While it may be difficult to include all languages spoken in Delhi, the top three, Hindi, Urdu, and English, should be translated for each record and oral history contribution. Translating into English is of particular importance, so Brits may also be able to read and hear the contextualized stories of the records creating during the British colonial rule in India. In order to keep up with this enormous task, either large numbers of volunteers would be necessary for maintenance or automatic language translation software could provide a more efficient alternative.

### **Who would not have access to the digital archive?**

While creating a digital archive may seem like the most democratic approach from a Western perspective, the reality is that most Indians do not have internet access due to

<sup>51</sup> Christen, Kimberly. “Opening Archives: Respectful Repatriation.” *The American Archivist* 74, no. 1 (2011), 187.

<sup>52</sup> “ICA Code of Ethics | International Council on Archives.” Accessed December 14, 2018. <https://www.ica.org/en/ica-code-ethics>.

<sup>53</sup> “Languages in Delhi.” Accessed December 13, 2018. <https://www.mapsofindia.com/delhi/languages.html>

infrastructural, financial, and educational constraints. According to a study conducted by the Pew Report Research Center in 2015, only 27% of Indian men and merely 17% of India women have internet access.<sup>54</sup> Because of this deficiency, the audience for the digital archive becomes scarce. One possible solution to overcome this hurdle would be having India Gate Digital Archive ambassadors focus on community outreach in order to reach New Delhi communities. Engaging in creative placemaking would reclaim public spaces with activities designed to gather oral history entries and share the digital archive in a group setting. Through these outreach efforts, a solid community could form around event-based activities as opposed to relying on individual participation behind personal computers.<sup>55</sup> In order to include as many people as possible within the India Gate Digital Archive, public interventions would need to be a regular occurrence in order to continually activate participants within the archival space.

### **Who will care for the physical conservation of the monument?**

In addition to the digital archive dedicated to the aggregation of records and stories relating to the India Gate, physical conservation of the monument itself must be considered. In travel guide literature from Lonely Planet to Delhi Tourism, the India Gate is often compared to the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, both for its initially intended memorialization qualities and the Romanesque archway design<sup>56</sup>. In early December 2018, financial hardships among Parisians

<sup>54</sup> Wu, Huizhong. "900 Million Indians Can't Get Online. Here's Why." CNNMoney, March 9, 2016. <https://money.cnn.com/2016/03/09/technology/india-internet-access/index.html>.

<sup>55</sup> "What Is Placemaking | Category." Accessed December 13, 2018. <https://www.pps.org/category/placemaking>.

<sup>56</sup> "Private Tour: Old And New Delhi City Sightseeing Tour | India." Lonely Planet. Accessed December 14, 2018. <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/india/activities/private-tour-old-and-new-delhi-city-sightseeing-tour/a/pa-act/v-7960P74/356195>.

sparked riots and protests resulting in the defacement on the Arc de Triomphe.<sup>57</sup> In an act of deviance against hiked fuel taxes, the “Yellow-Vest” demonstrators took to the streets and spray-painted government demands on the stone face of the archway.<sup>58</sup> Though the political and social realities are extremely different in France and India, this incident serves as a reminder that public monuments often serve as the background for political change and are not immune to vandalism. While INTACH would be responsible for the upkeep of the India Gate, the organization should also document all instances of defacement in order to keep a full record on the evolving history and reactions sparked by the arch.

### **Is it possible to digitize all records pertaining to the India Gate?**

Another challenge within this three-part proposal lies within the vast digitization project ahead. Not only will digitizing the number of materials relating to the India Gate be high, but the organization hurdles are enormous considering the fact that the materials are scattered at different institutions and personal homes around the world. Guidelines outlined by Laura Millar call for a narrow focus and prioritization plan in order to execute an achievable long-term digital preservation strategy.<sup>59</sup> By setting up metadata standardization guidelines, all contributors to the new records will remain uniform as the records remain in flux.

### **Conclusion**

The proposed India Gate Digital Archive, comprised of a digital community archive, oral history initiative, and digital humanities project, would create a space for reconsideration of the

<sup>57</sup> Katz, Brigit. “Arc de Triomphe to Reopen After Being Vandalized During ‘Yellow Vest’ Protests.” Smithsonian. Accessed December 13, 2018. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/arc-de-triomphe-reopen-after-being-vandalized-during-yellow-vest-protests-180970994/>.

<sup>58</sup> “13 Charged over Sacking of Arc de Triomphe during Paris Protests | News24.” News 24. Accessed December 13, 2018. <https://www.news24.com/World/News/13-charged-over-sacking-of-arc-de-triomphe-during-paris-protests-20181205>.

<sup>59</sup> Millar, Laura. “Preserving Archives.” in *Archives: Principles and Practices*, edited by Lesley Richmond, (London, UK: Facet Publishing, 2010), 167.

colonial monument. In this unified digital container, a redefinition of the records that constitute the history of the India Gate and the land it occupies become possible. Mukurtu serves as an ideal option for content management of the digitally aggregated objects, however questions surrounding facilitation still demands resolve. Additional challenges ahead include political barriers to the national libraries, archives, and municipal institutions from Britain to India. Funding, language obstacles, and access issues will shape the implementation process of this ambitious archival endeavor. Other challenges that reach beyond the scope of this essay include the ecological hardships facing New Delhi and the question of how to incorporate online documentation generated by tourists.

The records continuum model offers a nonlinear way of thinking about the India Gate and the history of its land. When it comes to colonial archives, records contained within them are constantly reoriented through the ever-shifting political, social, and personal forces contextualizing their existence. In an act of communal reflection, the people of New Delhi generate power and meaning by documenting their relationships and reactions to the India Gate monument; within these performative changes, the archive shifts towards a space of activism.

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Analysis and critical reflection 20%	20
Relevance of the topic to the course 20%	20
Demonstrated mastery of archival and recordkeeping concepts 20%	20
Integration of relevant references from the archival literature and elsewhere 20%	20
Written quality 20%	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>
Comments	Excellent paper, very well written and argued and relevant to the course. Very comprehensive and critical analysis of the possibility of an India Gate digital archive, acknowledging and addressing the different challenges the project might encounter as well as possible solutions or areas for further research. Relevant course readings, external literature and archival concepts were nicely introduced and interweaved throughout the paper. Really good job bringing these references together. I added some comments and made only a few edits throughout. Keep up the good work!